

Hafa Adai!

Marianas visitor arrivals up 442% in December. **PAGE 3**

Ogumoro is acting DPS chief; Deleon Guerrero is acting HSEM special ass't. **PAGE 3**

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Report: Prelim numbers show \$86M ARPA deficit



VISITOR ARRIVALS UP

A couple visiting from South Korea enjoy the view and cool, steady trade winds Friday afternoon at Banzai Cliff in Marpi on Saipan. A total of 9,868 visitors arrived from South Korea in December 2022, compared to 1,656 visitors in December 2021, according to the Marianas Visitors Authority. **Story on Page 3**

MARK FARMER

Presumptive Medicaid extended anew

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
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REPORTER

Because the federal government has yet to provide

a two-month notice lifting the National Public Health Emergency that was put in place due to COVID-19, the Presumptive Medicaid Eli-

gibility program will be extended again for another three months.

Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. CEO Esther Muña said

in a press conference last week that the federal government has yet to provide its two-months' notice officially lifting the National Public Health Emergency, that

See MEDICAID on Page 4

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
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REPORTER

The transition team's preliminary reconciliation has determined that the CNMI received \$481.8 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds but, as of Dec. 27, 2022, it has been overspent and overcommitted and has a deficit of \$86 million.

» **Among recommendations are to discontinue the additional 25% retiree pension payment, revision of ARPA spending plan**

According to a 2022 transition report on the Department of Finance submitted last Jan. 4 by transition department/agency team leader

Virginia C. Villagomez to the Palacios-Apatang administration, the deficit was in general caused by unallocated

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Villagomez

Jerry Tan named to nat'l tourism advisory board

By **KIMBERLY B. ESMORES**
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REPORTER

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo announced last Friday the appointment of Tan Holdings Corp. president and CEO Jerry Tan to the national U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory



Tan

TTAB who will advise the Commerce secretary on how government policies and pro-

grams affect the travel and tourism industry. They are also expected to offer counsel on current and emerging issues to support sustainable growth of the travel and tourism industry as our nation's economic engine.

Tan joins 31 other individuals nationwide on the

All 32 appointees are con-

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US nears new cooperation deals with two Pacific Island nations

By **MATTHEW LEE**
AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Biden administration is nearing deals with two Pacific

Island nations to extend ties that are considered critical to maintaining balance in the U.S.-China rivalry for

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INSIDE



BUSINESS

Satisfy your sweet tooth cravings with delicious desserts at Sweet Lane Pâtisserie.

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NATION

An engine mechanic took refuge in a shipping container as a tornado decimated his shop.

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LIFE & STYLE

Lisa Marie Presley will be buried at Graceland, the famed home of Elvis Presley.

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Local

CHRYSTAL MARINO

Members of the Rotary Club of Saipan pose with guest speakers Turnkey Solutions' William Richard "Billy" Grow and Joe Guerrero, and Commonwealth Recorder Kelsey Aldan, after their presentation last Tuesday at the club's luncheon at the Hyatt Regency Saipan in Garapan.

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NMI Judiciary introduces online filing via e-recorder

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
Correspondent

The CNMI Judiciary's newest technological innovation—an e-recording system that allow the online submission of legal documents—took centerstage in last Tuesday's Rotary Club of Saipan meeting.

Private company Turnkey Solutions and a representative of the NMI Judiciary highlighted the launching of the e-recorder and how the service will benefit both the Judiciary and community.

Turnkey Solutions' William Richard "Billy" Grow and company consultant Joe Guerrero, along with Commonwealth recorder Kelsey Aldan, said the e-recorder was provided to the CNMI Judiciary through a partnership with U.S.-based Trimin Systems and local provider TurnKey Solutions.

E-recorders not only make the process of recording and filing documents easier, but it will also be more convenient to access, they said.

Grow explained that through the system, the Commonwealth recorder for the judiciary is able to process it all from the computer in just a few minutes. "You can now file online, land records, marriage certificates, and maps, UCC-1's, UCC-2's all communally online," he said, adding that payments can also be paid online.

Not only will the e-recorder be user-friendly, but it will also accommodate individuals speaking the various languages in the CNMI, include secure credit card payment, and

along with a convenient 24/7 submission of e-files. That makes e-recording quicker and a more efficient process.

Access to documents is divided into three phases, with the first phase now in place, giving an individual the ability to view recorded documents through in-house, self-service kiosks. Phase 2, which was estimated to take place this month, gives limited but online access to recorded documents to individuals, while Phase 3, estimated to be in place by the end of 2023, will give online access to all recorded documents for all years.

When asked whether or not the electronic system will be able to detect fraudulent items or errors, Aldan said, "Basically what the recorder under the statute is responsible doing is accepting all filings as long as they comply with all the statutory requirements."

Aldan explained that the electronic process doesn't differ much from the original process, and the recorder may accept or reject filings based on whether or not statutory requirements are met or not. "So if there is an issue of fraud, which is concerning for a lot of business people around the community, that will still be processed through the normal process. As anyone would normally do, if there is a conflict, that is to contact the attorney general or file a lawsuit..."

"Whether a person comes in-person to file something or through the recorder's office, the issue of fraudulence will always be present, and that is something that is very hard to

detect..." Aldan said. "We are working with Trimin and Turnkey to put more measures in place to prevent any kind of breach or fraudulent activity..."

Trimin Systems, one of the first e-recording service and software provider in the U.S., partnered with Turnkey Solutions and worked to bring this technology to the NMI Judiciary, which, as Guerrero explained, wanted to modernize and digitize their services, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guerrero explained that many businesses, like banks and attorney's offices, file a lot of documents—sometimes on a daily basis—so it takes a lot of time for their staff. Also considering gas, you know, going down from the office—so now their staff love it because they can do it all online."

"When you record, once its recorded and reviewed by the recorder's office, they would return your copy, a stamped copy via email. That's your digital copy, so you don't really need a paper copy anymore. So even your land records, you don't need to get a paper copy and put it in your filing cabinet at home or safe. It's all stored electronically, so in the future if you ever lose your document, you can still go to the courthouse and get an electronic copy, but they won't have a paper copy," Guerrero said, adding that it is pretty fraud-proof. "Yes, it's secure. No one can just go in and manipulate documents."

After the presentation, the Rotary Club also welcomed new member Wilfredo Ching.

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Water service interruptions on Wed.

There will be a scheduled water service interruption on Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2023, from 8:30am to 4:30pm for Commonwealth Utilities Corp. customers in the areas of Airport Road, Lower Dandan, portions of Kannat Tabla, As Perdido, As Lito, Chalan Monsignor Martinez Road (from Shell Dandan gas station to the former ABCD Mar-

ket in Kohler) and Tottotville

This will allow CUC water operators to repair a 6-inch main transmission leak and 2-inch well discharge pipe leak located in front of the DD-8 water well in Lower Dandan. Customers should expect restoration of water services soon after the repairs.

For the safety of the men and women working at the

repair site, motorists are advised to take alternative routes or proceed with caution as a portion of the road way will be closed for the duration of the waterline repair.

For more information, contact the CUC Hotline (236-4333) or monitor our Facebook page for the latest updates (<https://www.facebook.com/CommonwealthUtilitiesCorporation>). (PR)

Marianas visitor arrivals up 442% in December

According to the Marianas Visitors Authority, arrivals to the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota grew 442% to 12,949 vis-

itors in December 2022, compared to 2,390 visitors received in December 2021.

Visitor arrivals to the Mar-

Ogumoro is acting DPS chief; Deleon Guerrero is acting HSEM special ass't

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
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REPORTER

Police director Aniceto T. Ogumoro was designated acting commissioner of the Department of Public Safety effective last Thursday.

In a memorandum last Thursday and addressed to all department and agency heads, Gov. Arnold I. Palacios also designated Emergency Management Operations director Gerald J. Deleon Guerrero as acting special assistant for the CNMI Homeland Security & Management effective that day.

Ogumoro served as acting DPS commissioner during the term of Gov. Benigno R. Fitial.

Last Dec. 16, then-governor

Ralph DLG Torres designated DPS Bureau of Motor Vehicles director Juana C. Leon Guerrero as acting DPS commissioner after then-DPS commissioner Robert Guerrero resigned.

Last Dec. 27, Torres designated Deleon Guerrero as acting special assistant for HSEM.

On Thursday, Palacios issued a memorandum informing government departments and agency heads of the appointment of former Rep. Leila F. Staffler, a Democrat, as acting Department of Labor secretary.

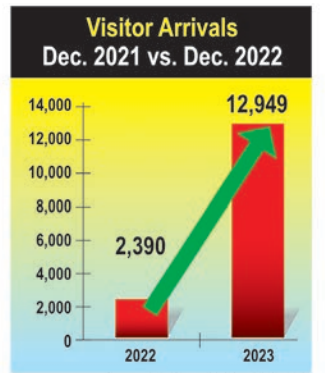
On Wednesday, the governor appointed Paul Tenorio as the executive director for the Criminal Justice Planning Agency effective immediately.

ianas have been increasing incrementally since the commencement of the Tourism Resumption Investment Plan in July 2021 but are still 77% lower for the month compared to before the coronavirus pandemic, when 52,297 visitors arrived in December 2019.

A total of 9,868 visitors arrived from South Korea in December 2022, compared to 1,656 visitors in December 2021. Flights to the Marianas by Asiana Airlines, Jeju Air, and T'Way were all booked at over 95% capacity for the month, the highest monthly load factor in 2022. Direct

flights from South Korea are anticipated to double in February with the operation of 16 charter flights by T'way Air.

The Marianas received 734 visitors from Japan in December 2022, another exponential increase compared to only 13 visitors in December 2021. Arrivals from Japan continue to increase steadily since the resumption of direct flights from Tokyo in September 2022, with direct flights to Saipan by United Airlines outpacing direct flights from secondary cities in Japan to the neighboring destination of Guam. The strength of the U.S. dollar continues to



Source: Marianas Visitors Authority

be a disincentive in both Japan and Korea for traveling to the Marianas. Overall, outbound travel from Japan is 80% lower than compared to before the coronavirus, and the Japanese government continues to offer incentives to encourage do-

mestic—rather than outbound—travel.

The Marianas also received 1,366 visitors from Guam, 717 visitors from the U.S., and a combined 264 additional visitors from all other destinations in December. (MVA)

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Koblerville Community Center hours today

In observance of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day today, Jan. 16, 2023, the Koblerville COVID-19 Community Center will have the following hours:

- Testing: 8am – 11am
- Office hours: 8am – 12pm

The Travel Test team can be reached at (670) 785-9966 or (670) 287-7570. (PR)

MCS closed today; no classes

In observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Mount Carmel School will not have classes and the campus will be closed today, Jan. 16, 2023. Normal working hours and classes will resume on Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023. For more information about Mount Carmel School, visit www.mountcarmelsaipan.com. (PR)

4.9-magnitude quake in Maug region

At 2:53am on Jan. 15, 2023, a report of a 4.9-magnitude earthquake occurred at 19.980°N 145.751°E in the Maug Islands region, Northern Mariana Islands. Currently, there are no tsunami warnings or advisories issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. For more information, please contact the CNMI EOC State Warning Point at (670)-237-8000. (PR)

SHEFA reminders

The Saipan Higher Education Financial Assistance program, or SHEFA, is reminding all interested applicants—new, ongoing, and returning bene-

ficiaries—that the deadline to submit application and supporting documents is on Feb. 28, 2023.

Apply online at www.saipanshefa.com. Create your student profile and submit your application! Here you will have instant access to the status of your application once your application package is submitted.

You must have all the required documents ready to upload in order for your application submission to go through. (PR)

University of Guam Board of Regents meeting

The special meeting of the University of Guam Board of Regents is scheduled for 3pm on Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2023, RFK Library, Silent Room, at UOG. The meeting will be publicly accessible by registering for Zoom access at <https://zoom.us/j/93604349607>.

A broadcast of the meeting via video livestream will be available on the UOG YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/uogtritons>.

The University of Guam complies with Guam Public Law 36-34 changes to the Open Government Law and Guam Public Law 24-109 with reference to the provisions and requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. For special accommodations, contact the ADA coordinator at 735-2244 or (TTY) 735-2243. Live closed captioning is available through a website link provided within the online meeting. (PR)

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Potluck celebrates successful transition, inauguration activities

By **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang joined a potluck gathering by their supporters at the Civic Center in Susupe yesterday to celebrate the smooth and successful transition and inauguration activities for the new administration.

Palacios told the crowd of less than 150 people that he and Apatang want to extend their appreciation to the transition and inauguration committee officials and members for



Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang thanks the people who showed up at their potluck gathering to celebrate the smooth and successful transition and inauguration activities, at the Civic Center in Susupe yesterday. Also in the photo, seated at the same table listening to Apatang's speech, is Gov. Arnold I. Palacios.

all their hard work.

Palacios said the transition and inauguration activities were a challenge because they had a runoff election and election results certification issue.

"It took us time to organize

the inauguration and the transition. But be that as it may, we got through it. We got through it because of a lot of people were giving a lot of work from both committees," the governor said.

He said a lot of people were impressed with the inauguration despite the challenges.

Palacios said it was a well-organized inauguration and that the guests from off island were impressed by the simplicity of the event.

A longer version of this story is available at www.saipantribune.com

PACIFIC

From page 1

influence in a region where the Chinese are rapidly expanding their economic, diplomatic and military clout.

This week, the U.S. signed memorandums of understanding with the Marshall Islands and Palau that administration officials hope will pave the way for the quick completion of broader agreements that will govern the islands' relations with Washington for

the next two decades. Those ties grant the U.S. unique military and other security rights on the islands in return for substantial aid.

The administration believes that extending those so-called "Compacts of Free Association" agreements will be key to efforts to retain American power and blunt Chinese assertiveness throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The memorandums signed this week lay out the amounts of money that the federal government will pro-

vide to the Marshall Islands and Palau if their compacts are successfully renegotiated. Negotiations on a similar memorandum with a third compact country, Micronesia, are ongoing.

The current 20-year compacts with the Marshall Islands and Micronesia expire this year; the current compact with Palau expires in 2024 but administration officials said they believe all three can be renewed and signed by mid-to late-spring.

Officials would not discuss

specifics of the amounts of money involved because the deals aren't yet legally binding and must still be reviewed and approved by Congress as part of the budget process.

A Micronesian news outlet, Marianas Variety, reported Thursday that the Marshall Islands will receive \$700 million over four years under the memorandum that it signed. But that amount would cover only one-fifth of a 20-year compact extension and does not include the amount Palau would receive.

MEDICAID

From page 1

essentially extends the Presumptive Medicaid Eligibility program to April 2023.

"The [previous] extension was set to expire on Jan. 10. Because no two months' notice was given, the government will have to extend the program another 90 days," she said.

The Presumptive Medicaid program was established pursuant to the National Public Health Emergency put in place due to COVID-19. It offers

immediate access to health care while applying for regular Medicaid or other health coverage. You can start using PE for Medicaid coverage right away for Medicaid-covered services, such as doctor visits, hospital care, and some prescription drugs.

Under the rule, a two-months' notice should be given before the Public Health Emergency is lifted, thus ending the program.

However, Muña said the two months' notice should have been given no later than November 2022. As a result,

because ample time was not given, the program will be extended.

The program has been extended numerous times since its inception back in 2020.

Presumptive eligibility, or PE, is an expedited process of enrolling eligible residents in the CNMI Medicaid program. It allows patients to have their care covered while waiting for their application to be fully processed. Starting the day you are approved for PE, you are able to go to any health care provider that accepts Medicaid.

Individuals and families are eligible for Medicaid if their attested gross income does not exceed 180% of the Supplemental Security Income federal benefit, which is about \$28,800 annually for a family of four.

Medicaid, under the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, has already started the "unwinding down" process, which essentially means vetting all the applications for those who were presumed eligible for Medicaid and determining whether they really are eligible for regular Medicaid or not.

ARPA

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expenditures related to special grants assistance (ARPA Section 602.A) and government operations (ARPA Section 602.C).

Villagomez added that ARPA was used to fund disaster-related expenditures pending reimbursement amounting to approximately \$48.7 million.

Upon reimbursements, the ARPA deficit will be reduced to \$37.4 million, she said.

Among the recommendations of the transition report are to discontinue the 25% additional retiree pension payment until the government stabilizes its current financial state, and initiate a revision to the ARPA spending plan with U.S. Treasury.

Villagomez was assist-

ed in preparing the report by then-representative and now Sen. Corina L. Magofna (Ind-Saipan), Ryan Camacho, Emma Perez, Tiara Evangelista, Tony Reyes, Eli Cabrera, Ezra Yumul, and Eleanor Alinas.

The initial transition report focused largely on the overall financial health of the CNMI and its major financial program(s).

Finding that the government's financial situation is dire, the transition team report stated that the months and years ahead will not be without hardship.

The report noted that the consequences of the overspending have been delayed but can no longer be avoided.

The government has neither the funds nor the means to sustain current levels of programs, employment, and services.

As the full extent of the financial shortfall will take time to ascertain, recommendations, however, are critical steps that can be taken immediately, the transition report said.

Among these recommendations is to conduct a full reconciliation of the ARPA and general fund expenditures, including validation of imported payables.

Other recommendations are to aggressively process federal reimbursements and draw-downs to reduce ARPA and general fund deficit, implement best practices to improve record-keeping and standardize processes for more accurate financial tracking and reporting, and review all outstanding contracts to reduce ARPA-funded obligations.

The transition team also recommended the following:

■ Enforce fiscal and bud-

getary controls to prevent deficit spending from the general fund and other funding sources.

■ Collaborate with the Office of Management & Budget to revise the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. The budget should consider a reduction in overall costs and restructure of services to reflect funding available.

■ Complete Munis implementation for full functionality by shifting resources back to the central government.

■ Train and develop Munis super-users to conduct hands-on training and troubleshooting for all departments and agencies.

■ Restore budget controls within Munis to prevent uncontrolled spending beyond limitations of appropriations.

A longer version of this story is available at www.saipantribune.com

TOURISM

From page 1

sidered leaders from businesses and organizations in the domestic travel and tourism industry. They are representatives of state and regional economic development teams, businesses, and organizations.

"Travel and tourism returned with force in 2022 as we opened up our country once again to visitors from around the globe. Since day one of the Biden administration, the Commerce department has taken decisive actions to support this industry's recovery. The U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board plays a vital role in providing expert recommendations and industry insight to optimize the American travel experience. I look forward to working with new and returning members," said Raimondo.

Aside from Tan, the 31 other appointees are:

■ Reggie Aggarwal, founder and CEO of Cvent;

■ Balram Bheodari, aviation general manager at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport;

■ Adam Burke, president and CEO of Los Angeles Tourism & Convention board;

■ Brian Chesky, cofounder and CEO of Airbnb;

■ Julie Coker, president and CEO of the San Diego Tourism Authority;

■ Brad Dean, CEO of Discover Puerto Rico;

■ Christine Duffy, president of Carnival Cruise Line;

■ Fred Felleman, commissioner at Port of Seattle;

■ Liz Fitzsimmons, managing director at Maryland Department of Commerce Office of Tourism and Film;

■ Matt Goldberg, president and CEO of Tripadvisor, Inc.;

■ Mufi Hannemann, president and CEO of Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association;

■ Russ Hedge, president and CEO of Hostelling International USA;

■ Bill Hornbuckle, president and CEO of MGM Resorts International;

■ Peter Ingram, president and CEO at Hawaiian Airlines;

■ Stephanie Jones, founder and CEO of Cultural Heritage Economic Alliance;

■ Andrew Leary, director of Sustainable Tourism and Partnerships, Leave No Trace;

■ Eric Lipp, founder and executive director of Open Doors Organization;

■ Casandra Matej, president and CEO of Visit Orlando;

■ Peter Millones, executive vice president and general counsel at Booking Holdings, Inc.;

■ Will Morey, president and CEO of The Morey Organization;

■ Tricia Primrose, executive vice president and chief Global Communications & Public Affairs officer at Marriott International;

■ Lana Ramos, vice president, and Marketing and Community Relations at Locally Grown Restaurants;

■ Carroll Rheem, founder and CEO of iolite group;

■ Dan Richards, founder and CEO of The Global Rescue Companies;

■ Adam Sacks, president, at Tourism Economics;

■ John Sage, president at Accessible Travel Solutions;

■ Stephen Scherr, CEO at Hertz Corp.;

■ Greg Schulze, senior vice president at Strategic Travel Partners Expedia;

■ Monica Smith, president and CEO at Southeast Tourism Society;

■ Donald "D" Taylor, president, UNITE HERE; and

■ Peter van Berkel, president of Travalco USA, Inc.

TTAB was first chartered in 2003 and has been re-chartered nine times. Past boards have provided advice on a wide range of policies and issues, including travel facilitation, visa policy, infrastructure, aviation security, tourism research, climate and economic sustainability.

6 from UOG, GCC certified as master food preservers

Island residents can now get guidance locally in food preservation following the certification last week of five University of Guam faculty and staff and a Guam Community College culinary professor as Hawaii Master Food Preservers.

The group was certified after 64 hours of hands-on instruction and an exam in canning, pickling, dehydration, and freezing of locally grown produce and meats.

Their certifications mean they are qualified to conduct workshops and one-on-one consultations. Four received trainer-level certifications that also allow them to certify others.

"Different foods grow abundantly in Guam at certain times of year, and a lot of it goes to waste. But by canning, pickling, and dehydrating, we can extend the shelf life of produce, and even meat, to be available year-round," said Bob Barber, extension specialist and professor of sustainable agriculture at UOG, who coordinated the training with the Hawaii Master Food Preservers program.

From turning calamansi into jams and jellies to pickling okra, long beans, and wing beans to high-pressure



UNIVERSITY OF GUAM

From left, UOG extension associate Phoebe Wall; Ken Love, president and instructor of Hawaii Master Food Preservers; UOG extension specialist Bob Barber; UOG extension associate Rynette Perez; Jane Tai, vice president and instructor of Hawaii Master Food Preservers; UOG research associate Chieriel Desamito; UOG extension agent Mark Acosta; and Paul Kerner, culinary professor at Guam Community College.

preservation, contact Barber at (671) 787-7391 or bbarber@triton.uog.edu. The team will also be conducting public workshops. Residents can view upcoming events at www.uog.edu/extension or sign up to receive email notices at url.uog.edu/extension-subscribe. (UOG)

canning of poultry, game, and seafood, food can be preserved by home gardeners, farmers or small-business entrepreneurs.

Earning the trainer-level certification were Barber, UOG extension associate Rynette Perez, extension agent Mark Acosta, and research associate Chieriel Desamito. Earning certification as Hawaii Master Food Preservers were UOG extension associate Phoebe Wall and Paul Kerner, a culinary professor at Guam Community College.

"During the pandemic, we experienced a small glimpse of how fragile Guam's food supply system can be, and more so just how important sustainable food practices are," Perez said.

The training was funded by the Western Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Smith-Lever capacity grant through UOG Cooperative Extension and Outreach.

If you're interested in food



COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



INVITATION FOR BIDS CUC-IFB-23-011

LOWER MIHA SEWER LINE REPLACEMENT

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Lower Miha Sewer Line Replacement in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The project consists of but not limited to the installation of gravity sewer main, new sewer manholes, new service laterals, connection to existing service laterals, and the abandonment of existing sewerline, removal and disposal of existing sewer manholes.

The project is funded by a grant from the United States of Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and CUC. The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.

CUC requires the project to be completed in **365 calendar days** from date of award of contract.

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The IFB package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of \$200.00 for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on January 24, 2023 at 10:00 AM (ChST) at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No. 17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) copies of the bid MUST be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-23-011, Lower Miha Sewer Line Replacement"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on February 7, 2023**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A Bid Guarantee of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety.

A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract. Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from pre-registered bidders and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 27, 2023** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org, with a copy to Larry Manacop, Acting Chief Engineer for Water/Wastewater via email at larry.manacop@cucgov.org, Dennis Formalejo, CUC Water/Wastewater Engineer via email at dennis.formalejo@cucgov.org and Ms. Christie L. Sablan Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician via email address at christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids for any reason and waive any defects in said bid proposal, if in its sole opinion, to do so would be in the best interest of CUC. All bids shall become the property of CUC.



COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



INVITATION FOR BID CUC-IFB-23-012

Carbon Change Out of Granular Activated Carbon Filters (10 Sites)

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for Carbon Change Out of Granular Activated Carbon Filters (10 Sites) in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The intent of the contract is for the Contractor to provide all labor, equipment, supplies, and materials necessary for the removal and installation of GAC and Gravel media replacement, disposal of spent GAC and Gravel media, possible sample collection, transportation, and the possible supply of gravel media, analyses of spent media, and additional waste containers/drums for disposal, if necessary. CUC requires the Project to be completed in **180 calendar days** from date of award of contract.

The project is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

Prospective Bidders must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of **\$200.00** (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by site visits will be held on **December 28, 2022 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No. 17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

One (1) original and Five (5) copies of the bid must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked **"CUC-IFB-23-012, Carbon Change Out of Granular Activated Carbon Filters (10 Sites)"** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **10:00 AM (ChST) on January 17, 2023**, at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Bids mailed via postal or courier service must be received on or before due date and time or post-marked before due date and time. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement this form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

A Bid Guarantee of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety or other surety acceptable to the Attorney General. A Payment Bond of One Hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidders. The payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety or other surety acceptable to the Attorney General. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.

Bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

This Invitation for Bids does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of bids in anticipation of a contract. Bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

Questions or requests for clarification will be entertained only from registered Proponents and must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 a.m. (ChST) on January 4, 2023** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator via email address manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Nicolette Villagomez, CUC Water/Wastewater Engineer via email address nicolette.villagomez@cucgov.org and to Christie Sablan, P&S, Senior Administrative Technician - christie.sablan@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

GARY P. CAMACHO
Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

Amata meets with top leaders during Micronesia trip

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Following the House election of the speaker on Saturday morning, Delegate Uifa'atali Amata (R-Amer. Samoa), at the request of House Natural Resources Committee chair Bruce Westerman, represented the committee at the front end of a five-day whirlwind trip through Micronesia, which in-

cluded stops in Guam, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Majuro.

"I was humbled that at each stop I was personally greeted by the head of government, and have important perspectives to share with my colleagues in Washington," said Amata.

Her meetings came at the same time in Los Angeles that



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Delegate Uifa'atali Amata of American Samoa is shown at the CNMI inaugural ball speaking with Palau President Surangel Whipps, Jr. and Gov. Arnold I. Palacios.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Delegate Uifa'atali Amata of American Samoa is shown in discussions with Chuuk Gov. Alexander R. Narruhn.

representatives of republics of Palau and the Marshall Islands were signing memoranda of understanding with U.S. officials on extension of financial provisions of the Compact of Free Association.

"Although we had laid the groundwork for holding planside consultations earlier, we had advised the governments involved that the protracted House speakership election forced us to advise them that it looked like there would be insufficient time to get to Saipan for the inauguration of Gov. Arnold I. Palacios and Lt. Gov. David Apatang,

which was to be the linchpin of the trip," explained Amata.

When the speaker impasse broke in the wee hours of Saturday morning, the congresswoman discovered that if she



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Delegate Uifa'atali Amata of American Samoa is shown meeting with Federated States of Micronesia President David Panuelo.

were able to get to the airport for an 8:30am departure, she could get to Saipan at 2am Monday in time for a 10am inauguration. So, 36 hours after giving new House Speaker

Kevin McCarthy a congratulatory hug, she set foot on Saipan. During her 30 hours on Saipan, Amata also had opportunities to meet with Palau President Surangel Whipps, Jr., Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero, and Speaker of the Guam Legislature Therese Terlaje. She then traveled to Guam, where she met with leaders of the Guam Chamber of Commerce.

From Guam, she took United Airlines' "island hopper" to Chuuk State, Pohnpei, the capital of the Federated States of Micronesia, and Majuro, the capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. By the time her plane landed in Honolulu, she had completed over the course of three days consultations with the presidents of three countries, three governors and met with a variety of foreign ministers, legislative leaders, and other officials.

At the first stop in the Federated States of Micronesia, she met with Chuuk State Gov. Alexander R. Narruhn and Senate Vice President Wisney Nakayama, the son of the late first FSM president Tosiwo Nakayama of Chuuk. Next, on Pohnpei, she met with FSM President David Panuelo, foreign secretary Kandhi Elieisar, Compact negotiators Leo Falcam, Jr. and Asterio Takesy and other top national officials. In Majuro, where her family lived for four years while her father was head of government (district administrator), Amata met with President David Kabua, U.N. Ambassador Amat-lain Kabua, Foreign Minister Kitlang Kabua, and other high government officials.

"This trip at the outset of a new Congress was an important opportunity to renew old friendships, meet new leaders, and update my understanding of the region's most pressing problems. It is important for the island governments to reach agreements with the Biden administration," she said, "but they still will need to work with Congress, which controls the funds." (PR)



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Delegate Uifa'atali Amata of American Samoa is shown meeting with Marshall Islands President David Kabua.



2023 CCA Board of Directors & GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING NOTICE

The Commonwealth Cancer Association is inviting the community, cancer survivors, friends, and supporters to its annual general membership meeting on Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 5:30PM at CCA Conference Room in Gualo Rai.

The agenda will include Reports, Elections of four (4) board members and New Business. Nominations for board members will be accepted in advance via email and/or during the meeting. This meeting will be in person.

To submit board nomination, or for more information please contact CCA at 682- 0050 or email at mcamacho.cca@gmail.com



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Pentagon drops COVID-19 vaccine mandate for troops but...

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Pentagon formally dropped its COVID-19 vaccination mandate Tuesday last week, but a new memo signed by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin also gives commanders some discretion in how or whether to deploy troops who are not vaccinated.

Austin's memo has been widely anticipated ever since legislation signed into law on Dec. 23 gave him 30 days to rescind the mandate. The Defense Department had already stopped all related personnel actions, such as discharging troops who refused the shot.

"The Department will continue to promote and encourage COVID-19 vaccination for all service members," Austin said in the memo. "Vaccination enhances operational readiness and protects the force."

Austin said that commanders have the authority to maintain unit readiness and a healthy force. He added, however, that other department policies—including mandates for other vaccines—remain in place. That includes, he said, "the ability of commanders to consider, as appropriate, the individual immunization status of personnel in making deployment, assignment, and other operational decisions, including when vaccination is required for travel to, or entry into, a foreign nation."

The contentious political issue, which has divided America, forced more than 8,400 troops out of the military for refusing to obey a lawful order when they declined to get the vaccine. Thousands



U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY SPC. ERIC CERAMI/ 55TH SIGNAL COMPANY

Pfc. Riley Tiedt, assigned to the 2-127th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, Wisconsin National Guard, administers a COVID vaccination to an Afghan evacuee during Operation Allies Welcome at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, Sept. 3, 2021.

of others sought religious and medical exemptions. Austin's memo ends those exemption requests.

Austin, who instituted the mandate in August 2021 after the Pfizer vaccine was approved by the Food and Drug Administration and as the coronavirus pandemic raged, was staunch in his desire to maintain it insisting the vaccine was necessary to protect the health of the force. He and other defense leaders argued that for decades troops, particularly those deployed overseas, had been required to get as many as 17 different vaccines. No other vaccine mandates were affected by the new law.

But Congress agreed to rescind the mandate, with opponents reluctantly saying that

perhaps it had already succeeded in getting the bulk of the force vaccinated. Roughly 99% of active-duty troops in the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps had gotten the vaccine, and 98% of the Army. The Guard and Reserve rates are lower, but generally are more than 90%.

Austin's memo was unapologetic in his continued support for the vaccine, and his belief that the mandate kept the force healthy and able to protect America. The Pentagon's vaccine efforts, he said, "will leave a lasting legacy in the many lives we saved, the world-class force we have been able to field, and the high level of readiness we have maintained, amidst difficult public health conditions."

In addition to ending efforts to discharge troops who refuse the vaccine, Austin's memo says that those who sought exemptions and were denied will have their records updated and any letters of reprimand will be removed.

Those who were discharged for refusing to obey a lawful order to take the vaccine re-

ceived either an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions. Austin's memo says that anyone who was discharged can petition their military service to request a change in the "characterization of their discharge" in their personnel records. It does not, however, say what possible corrections could be awarded.

Austin's decision leaves some discretion to commanders, allowing them to decide whether they can require vaccines in some circumstances, such as certain deployments overseas.

Military officials vividly recall the overwhelming crisis of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the Navy aircraft carrier that was knocked out of duty and sidelined in Guam for 10 weeks in early 2020 as the emerging virus swept through the ship. More than 1,000 crew members eventually became infected, and one sailor died.

Military leaders worry that if troops begin to refuse the vaccine in large numbers, similar outbreaks could occur. The risk is particularly high on small ships or submarines

where service members are jammed into close quarters for weeks or months at a time, or on critical combat missions, such as those involving special operations forces that deploy in small teams.

According to data compiled by the military as of early December, the Marine Corps leads the services with 3,717 Marines discharged. There have been 2,041 discharged from the Navy, 1,841 from the Army and 834 from the Air Force. The Air Force data includes the Space Force.

What's not clear is if the services, who are facing recruiting challenges, will want—or be able to—allow any of those service members to return to duty, if they still meet all necessary fitness and other requirements.

Lawmakers argued that ending the mandate would help with recruiting. Defense officials have pushed back by saying that while it may help a bit, a department survey during the first nine months of last year found that a large majority said the mandate did not change the likelihood they would consider enlisting.

US, Marshall Islands sign MOU

The U.S. and Republic of the Marshall Islands governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding affirming their close and continuing partnership and reflecting a shared understanding reached on levels and types of future U.S. assistance to be requested for the Marshall Islands.

Special presidential envoy for compact negotiations Joseph Yun signed the memorandum for the United States and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kitlang Kabua signed for the Marshall Islands.

Marshall Islands Ambassador Gerald Zackios and assistant secretary of Insular and

International Affairs Carmen G. Cantor of the U.S. Department of the Interior attended the signing in Los Angeles.

The MOU was signed as part of the Compact of Free Association negotiations and confirms the shared desire to strengthen the special partnership between the two nations. (PR)

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COMMONWEALTH PORTS AUTHORITY

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Website: <https://cnmports.com>

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT # 01-2023

Opening date: January 09, 2023	Closing date: January 27, 2023
Location: SAIPAN	SALARY
Position(s): (1) Receptionist/Secretary (1) Ports Police Officer I	PL 5/1 to 5/12 (\$8.83/hr. to \$15.10/hr.) PL 7/1 to 7/12 (\$9.73/hr. to \$16.65/hr.)
Location: PORT OF SAIPAN	SALARY
Position(s): (1) General Maintenance III	PL 7/1 to 7/12 (\$9.73/hr. to \$16.65/hr.)
Location: TINIAN	SALARY
Position(s): (2) General Maintenance I (2) Custodial I (4) Ports Police/ARFF Trainee	PL 2/1 to 2/12 (\$7.63/hr. to \$13.04/hr.) PL 1/1 to 1/12 (\$7.26/hr. to \$12.42/hr.) PL 5/1 (\$8.83/hr.)

Employment Application must be accompanied with a copy of all required diploma/certificates and/or official sealed transcripts, original copy of recent police record not more than six (6) months old, original copy of U.S. Department of Defense Form DD214 for retired members or veterans of our Armed Forces, and other documents as required for the position. Public Law 11-70 requires that all male applicants age 18 to 25 years old must submit documentation evidencing his registration with the Federal Selective Service System. All applications and required documents must be submitted to the **CPA Administration Office, 2nd Floor Arrival Building, Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport or CPA Administration Office Tinian International Airport or Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport.** Failure to provide any of the required documents will result in automatic disqualification. Certain vacancies may require written and/or physical test. Selected applicants will be subjected to pre-employment drug screening, 10-year Criminal History Record Check and 49 CFR Part 1542.209(d) Requirements. CPA reserves the right to waive or implement other qualifications to meet its needs. The deadline for submission of applications and required documents to the CPA Administration Office (Saipan) or at the Tinian International Airport or Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport is no later than **5:00 P.M. on Friday, January 27, 2023.**

Detailed information on qualifications and position descriptions for the above positions may be picked up along with the application form from Monday-Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., except on holidays, at the CPA Administration Office (2nd Floor) of the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport, Arrival Terminal or CPA Admin. Office at the Tinian International Airport or at the Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport. For additional information, please contact the CPA Human Resources Office by email at lorna.tenorio@cnmports.com or by phone at (670)237-6500.

CPA is an Equal Opportunity Employer and CPA hires those who are legally entitled to employment in the CNMI.

CHRISTOPHER S. TENORIO
Executive Director

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands BOARD OF PAROLE

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E-mail: nickreyes.bop@gmail.com

TO ALL MEDIA SERVICES PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

MESSAGE: The Honorable Arnold I. Palacios and the Honorable Lt. Governor David M. Apatang, through the CNMI Board of Parole Office, and pursuant to Public Law 8-41, Section II of the "Open Government Act of 1992," hereby give "Official Notice" that a **Revocation Hearing** is scheduled for **January 19, 2023 (Thursday) at 8:00 am** at the CNMI Board of Parole Office Building 1216, located at Capitol Hill, Saipan MP 96950. The following individual (s) will appear before the Board of Parole.

Parolee

- | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Eugene Blas Repeki | Cr. Cs. #: 00-0162B | B.O.P #: 09-013 |
| 2. Edward I. Blas | Cr. Cs. #: 17-0069 | B.O.P #: 22-007-RA |

Should you have any further inquiries, or need any additional information, please contact the CNMI Board of Parole Office at telephone number (670) 664-3300.

/s/ Lucinda R. Selepeo
Acting Chairwoman
CNMI Board of Parole

01/13/2023
Date

Opinion

Hafa Adai!

Saipan Tribune

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AP The Associated Press

Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

Of course the DOJ should investigate Biden's classified documents

After months of bashing the Justice Department for going after the former president, Republicans are welcoming an investigation into the current one.

Attorney General Merrick Garland announced Thursday that he would be appointing a special prosecutor to investigate how and why classified documents from President Joe Biden's time in the Obama administration remained in his possession.

"As I have said before, I strongly believe that the normal processes of this department can handle all investigations with integrity," Garland said at a news conference Thursday. "But under the regulations, the extraordinary circumstances here require the appointment of a special counsel."

It was revealed this week that Biden's legal team discovered a set of classified documents when cleaning out his personal office in Washington, D.C., in November. A second set of documents was also apparently found at his home in Delaware. Both sets of documents were said to be leftover from his time as vice president. North Carolina Republican Rep. Dan Bishop expressed concern that the public was just now finding out if the documents were discovered in November.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis and other Republicans called on Garland to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate the Biden matter, saying "there should be no double standard in our justice system." Garland complied.

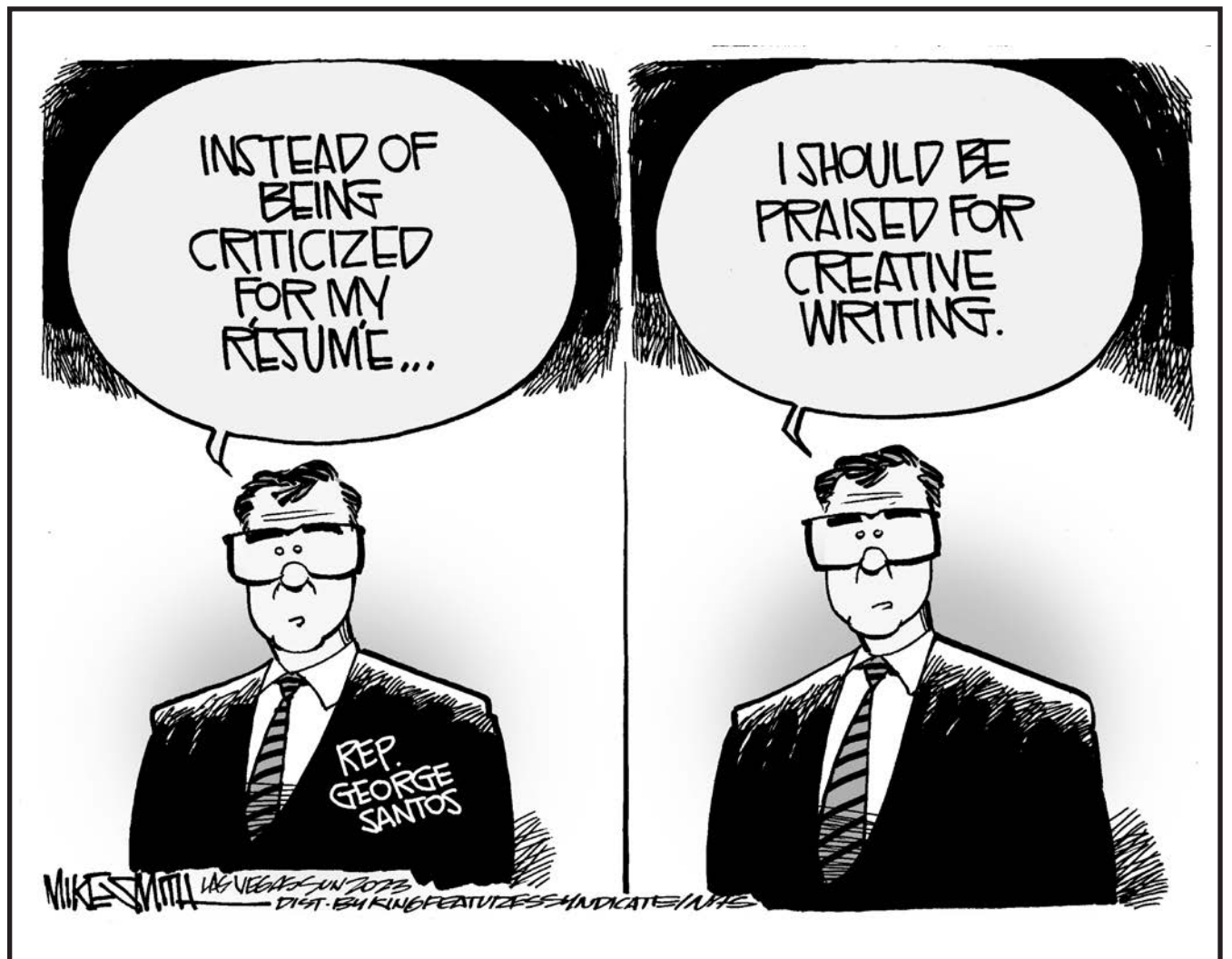
The Biden news has drawn comparisons to the ongoing criminal investigation into former President Donald Trump's potential mishandling of classified documents, which came to a head in August when the FBI executed a search warrant at Mar-a-Lago.

While the inquiries into Trump and Biden both concern classified documents, the two cases appear to have key differences—despite the GOP's eagerness to conflate them. A "small number" of classified documents were found in Biden's possession, and his lawyers immediately notified authorities, voluntarily returning the documents as soon as they were discovered. More than 300 documents have been recovered from Trump since he left office in 2021, many of which were only obtained through a subpoena and a court-authorized search of Trump's private residence.

Most significantly, investigators are also evaluating whether to charge Trump with obstruction of justice or destruction of documents, because he and his legal team may have defied subpoenas and made false statements in their failure to turn over all relevant documents.

We agree with Garland's decision to appoint a special prosecutor with Biden. An investigation is not an indictment—it's an opportunity to provide clarity where answers are needed, and we welcome that.

See BIDEN on Page 9



The red flag America never sees

At the right time of day, you can hear an elementary school before you can see it, and if the air is still and the natural acoustics favorable, the discordant symphony of America's youngest students at recess is an auditory blessing.

The beautiful racket that boils from an attack on playground equipment or a race around it or any of the thousand other impulses bursting from dynamo bodies and newly freed minds has a clamorous harmony like nothing else.

There's one school I walk past almost every day, through the park across the street, then back across the full span of its architectural footprint. With or without the soundtrack, I look for only one thing—someone who looks out of place, or who is carrying something that looks out of place, but more bluntly, someone with a gun.

Since about Columbine (1999).

There is no school at Richneck Elementary in Newport News, Virginia, this week because last week ended with a first grade teacher getting shot in her classroom by a 6-year-old.

"This," said Newport News Mayor Phillip Jones, "is a red flag for the country."

Respectfully, Mayor, you new to this country?

This country did not lose its gun-loving mind last Friday. It took decades upon decades of ill-conceived arguments, millions upon millions of gun lobby dollars, and generations upon generations of gutless politicians to make this a country with more guns than people, a country with less than 5% of the world's population holding 40% of its civilian-owned weaponry.

If the red flag is the signal to question how a 6-year-old got a gun in the United States of America, the better question is probably, "How did he avoid it for the first five years of his life?"

Only by the favorable exactitudes of trajectory and ballistics was first grade teacher Abby Zwerner not murdered in her classroom by a 6-year-old extracting a gun from his backpack—and maybe that's why this particular news story got such poor traction in a media culture consumed by Prince Harry, Kevin McCarthy and the all-important re-jiggering of the NFL playoff format. Nobody died at Richneck Elementary. It was the first school shooting of the year. If trends continue, we'll get 50 or 60 more.

If there's a red flag still flappable in all of this, it might be the psychological compromise we demand from America's children to appease the craven political culture that contorts itself to the Second Amendment. Some days, many days, the saddest news story anywhere is that 6-year-olds go to school fearful of being shot so that someone's desire to own an assault rifle shall not be

By GENE COLLIER

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



infringed. Some days, many days, it's hard to tell who the real 6-year-olds are.

"I was scared," a fifth grader told one of the cable channels in Newport News. "It was like my first lockdown and I didn't know what to do, so I just hid under my desk like everybody else."

That's a terrible way to count your blessings. You made it to 10 before your first lockdown.

Ninety-five percent of public schools in America have some kind of active shooter drills, but the youngest kids, the most fragile, still aren't going to know what to do when someone walks in with a legally purchased AR-15. The burden on those kids is preposterous, unconscionable. It's one thing to fret about your math homework; it's very much another to see if you can remember where to hide when the man with the gun comes.

The most sickening quote I've ever seen was something an elementary school kid told his parents about active shooter drills; he hates them because "the good hiding places are always taken first. There's nothing to hide behind. He'll be able to see me."

In America, in 2022, gun violence surpassed car crashes as the No. 1 killer of young people. Schools, our supposed safe space, have been the stage for nearly 150 shootings since 2018. We went from smoke free school zones to drug free school zones, but some days, many days, it seems we won't be happy until we have school free gun zones.

A law professor who runs the Children's Defense Clinic at the University of Richmond weighed in Tuesday on the matter of what to do with the 6-year-old shooter. "Obviously this is a tragedy on every level," she said. "As a 6-year-old, he just doesn't have the intellectual capacity to even understand how to form the intent to commit a crime like this."

No, he doesn't. But a gun—yeah, that he's got.

One day the sound an elementary school makes before you see it will be different, no longer pulsating with its total color and richness, not exactly full with its accustomed joy. There will be no mystery as to why.

Amata highlights MLK Jr. Day

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Delegate Uifa'atali Amata of American Samoa released the following statement in recognition of Martin Luther King Jr. Day: "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., lived a life that is still making a difference today. His letters and speeches are studied

and quoted decades later, and as powerful now as the day they were first used. His words and public example still inspire us to continue the work of equality and opportunity with love of country. He changed hearts and minds through persuasion, always peaceful but passionate, leaving our nation stronger and more unified."

Included on his monument in the nation's capital is this quotation from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1964: "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant."

POINT: Racial shifts in voting—What's in the future?

Editor's Note: These columns address what is behind the shifts in Black and Latino voting patterns.

Through a phenomenon called "linked fate," small or marginalized groups tend to vote more as a unit rather than as individuals, assuming that without doing so they may not have a loud enough voice in the political system. However, exhaustion from a series of broken promises is breaking up these long-held strongholds.

The Black vote for Democrats dropped from 90% to 86% in 2022. While this seems like a small shift, it's shocking for a population whose vote has often been taken for granted by the party. The Latino vote for Democrats dropped from 69% to 60%, a much more precipitous shift in a far less unified population.

Most familiar is the distinction between conservative Cubans who fled the Castro regime versus more liberal Mexicans, many of whom have undocumented family members. But last year, voters with Mexican roots flipped famously Democratic Miami-Dade County for Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis.

What's going on here, and is it a harbinger of things to come?

To quote American economist Glenn Loury, social science is harder than physics, but knowing about the specifics of Black and Latino culture can show us why tensions with an increasingly left-wing Democratic Party are rising.

First, it shouldn't be assumed that Black and Latino voters are unconcerned with border security. Legal immigrants can be surprisingly frustrated with leniency for those who didn't have to endure the same exhausting process they did. And to the extent that these minority groups are overrepresented among the working class, new immigrants are often painted as challengers for jobs or wages.

This is largely untrue unless we're referring to the tiny percentage of the population

By **RACHEL FERGUSON**
InsideSources.com

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without a high school diploma. Most people aren't aware of how much immigration boosts the American economy. But even if they favor more open borders, it's fairly obvious that we could secure the border while making the immigration process easier and come to a reasonable compromise. Many conclude, therefore, that the immigration issue is such a great political football that nobody in Congress wants to solve it, including the Democrats.

Second, in Black church tradition and the Catholicism of many Latinos, government growth is more positive than in the white church. But minority Christians are still conservative on matters of sexuality and gender.

While acceptance of gay marriage shot up after the Supreme Court's Obergefell decision with an it-doesn't-really-affect-me shrug, the cultural push for adolescent transgenderism, polyamory and related issues is simply a bridge too far for these religious folks. With Democratic mainstays such as teachers unions representing some of the biggest supporters of such movements, many minority parents are furious.

This only adds fuel to the fire for Black and Latino complaints about inadequate schools and unacceptable crime rates in their neighborhoods. Minority parents tend to support school choice despite stern Democratic opposition. While Black Americans polled in 2020 agreed that they'd like to be treated better by the police, 80% said they wanted either the same or more police in their neighborhoods.

Education and crime are not abstract talking points but are instead practical, day-to-day matters that deeply affect us. I

met a Black lobbyist who had returned from stumping for left-leaning policies in D.C. Upon returning to his Chicago neighborhood, however, he thought, "What difference did our policies make? Is anything any better?"

While the Democrats used to be associated with the worker, they are now associated with college-educated elites, and studies show that the further left one goes, the richer and whiter one gets.

Minority Democratic voters are the most centrist of their party. While Republicans were once the party of establishment business types, they now seem to care about the ignored and disdained American worker—of whatever color. Black incomes increased so much between 2017 and 2019 that the Black poverty rate dropped below 20% (to 18%) for the first time in American history.

Furthermore, Black and Latino Americans have always been among our most entrepreneurial citizens and feel keenly the layers of regulation that favor entrenched fat cats while blocking small startups, COVID restrictions included.

There's only one way the Republicans can screw this up, and they very well may. Republicans have become notorious for their willingness to flay struggling communities for their failures. The tone of condemnation doesn't encourage or attract. A new wave of Black and Latino Republicans, a la South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, must do justice to the historical struggle of minority communities while favoring conservative policies. Candace Owens-esque negativity is a losing proposition.

potential mishandling of classified documents seriously, regardless of whether the person is a Democrat or Republican. That helps refute the loud allegations of politicization that Republicans have hurled at the DOJ—and are planning to investigate now that they've taken the House majority.

COUNTERPOINT: Education and crime drive Black voters to the GOP

With another Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday today, our nation has much to celebrate as we strive toward MLK's dream of a colorblind society.

Since King's assassination in 1968, our nation has elected and re-elected its first African American president. We've also recently sworn in our first African American female associate Supreme Court justice, who joins fellow African American Justice Clarence Thomas on the nation's highest court.

There are now African American entrepreneur billionaires and African Americans (male and female) who have reached the pinnacle of the business world by becoming CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. The substantial progress many African Americans have made since the 1960s civil rights era is genuinely momentous and should be celebrated.

Unfortunately, not every member of the African American community, especially those living in impoverished and underserved areas, has experienced the upward mobility many of their Black brothers and sisters have enjoyed.

According to a CNN article, "The typical Black American family is virtually no closer to equal footing with its white peers in terms of income and wealth than it was 50 years ago."

The bipartisan Joint Economic Committee, which consists of Republicans and Democrats from the Senate and House, released a study in 2020 titled "The Economic State of Black America in 2020." The study found some troubling statistics.

■ The typical Black household earns a fraction of white families—just 59 cents for every dollar. The gap between Black and white annual household incomes is about \$29,000 per year.

■ The median wealth of Black families (\$17,000)—is less than one-tenth that of

By **CHRISTOPHER ARPS**
InsideSources.com

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white families (\$171,000).

■ Black Americans are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as white Americans.

■ Black children are three times as likely to live in poverty as white children.

■ The wealth gap between Black and white households increases with education.

African Americans have traditionally been the constituency that the Democratic Party has relied upon for consistent and loyal votes. These voters typically vote 90% to 96% for the Democratic choice on the ballot. But we witnessed a significant change in that pattern, starting with the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Trump received a whopping 20% of the African American male vote in 2020, and he also increased his vote percentage with African American female voters. This trend was not just an anomaly for Trump. Other Republican officeholders also made gains. The most striking was in Georgia.

The Associated Press' AP VoteCast performed an extensive national survey of the electorate after the 2020 midterms, and what it found should be cause for alarm for the Democratic Party.

AP found that Republican candidates were backed by 14% of African American voters. In the 2018 midterm elections, Republicans only won 8% of the Black vote. In Georgia, Gov. Brian Kemp more than doubled his percentage of the African American vote, increasing to 12% from 5% just four years earlier.

There are two reasons for the exodus of African

American voters from the Democratic Party. One is quality education and inadequate schools. Two, the rising crime rate disproportionately affects inner-city communities.

The COVID pandemic opened the eyes of many parents to the "wokeness" their children were being taught in their schools, and because of that, more Black families turned to homeschooling during the pandemic.

As ABC News reported: "Census shows the proportion of Black families homeschooling recently quintupled. Homeschooling, once a relatively niche form of education that has been growing steadily in the past decades, has seen a big uptick due to the COVID-19 pandemic with Black families adopting the practice at a notably high rate."

Violent crime is at levels we haven't seen since the 1970s. FBI statistics show a significant spike in crime (a 30% increase in violent crime in 2020 compared to the previous year) occurred after the George Floyd murder in 2020. That was the largest single-year increase since the FBI started tracking those numbers in the 1960s.

Education and crime are universal concerns that appeal to every voter regardless of race, color, creed, religion or ethnicity. Most voters don't want to be pandered to with insulting, shop-worn campaign tactics supposedly geared toward them. The political party or movement that understands this and plans accordingly will make further inroads with voting blocs with whom they have traditionally not done well.

If the Biden and Trump situations are indeed different, then the investigation will reflect that instead of allowing resentment and conspiracy to fester. Regardless, Americans should be pleased the DOJ is doing its job.

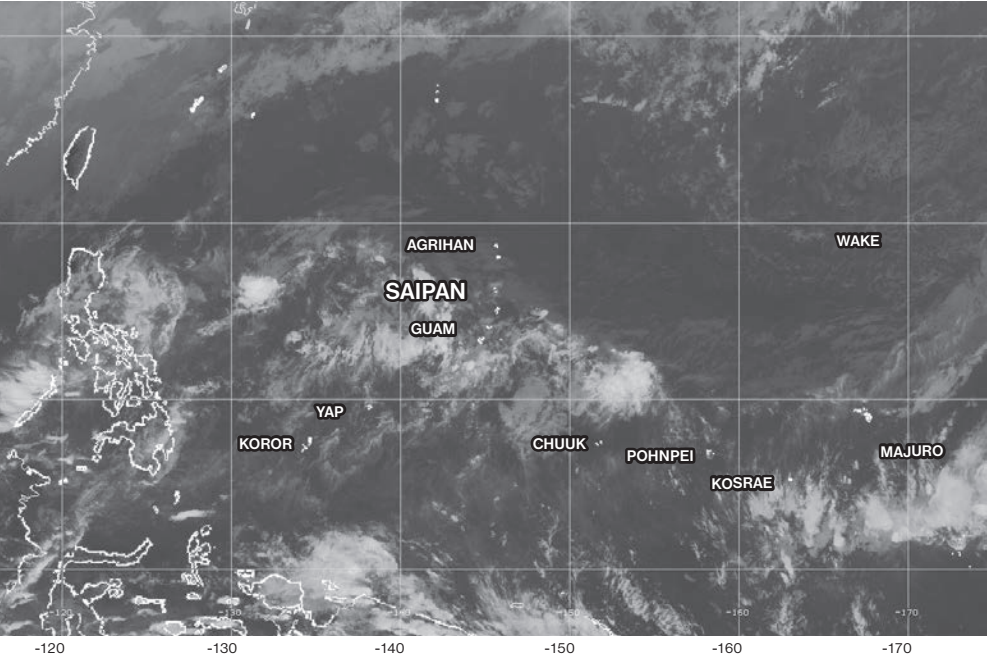
BIDEN

From page 8

It shows Americans that the Justice Department will take any

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN									
TODAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY	
Isolated showers. Mostly sunny		Mostly sunny		Mostly sunny		Mostly sunny		Mostly sunny	
85°	77°	85°	76°	85°	75°	86°	77°	86°	77°
YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE									



PICTURE TIME: 9:28 AM, SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2023
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Guam Doppler weather radar shows scattered showers moving through the Marianas Waters. The shear line is devolving out here at the western end. The buoys reveal combined seas of 9 to 13 feet, composed mainly of northeast swell with some wind waves.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

MICRONESIA			▲▼°F
Guam and Rota	Thunderstorms	83° / 77°	
Palau	Thunderstorms	82° / 76°	
Yap	Thunderstorms	85° / 78°	
Chuuk	Scattered Thunderstorms	85° / 79°	
Pohnpei	Scattered Thunderstorms	86° / 78°	
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	85° / 79°	
Majuro	Thunderstorms	83° / 79°	

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:46 AM	6:06 PM
Tuesday	6:46 AM	6:06 PM
Wednesday	6:46 AM	6:07 PM
Thursday	6:46 AM	6:08 PM
Friday	6:46 AM	6:08 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	12:49 AM	12:42 PM	-
Tuesday	1:43 AM	1:26 PM	-
Wednesday	2:42 AM	2:15 PM	-
Thursday	3:46 AM	3:13 PM	-
Friday	4:53 AM	4:17 PM	-

AROUND THE GLOBE			▲▼°F
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	72° / 61°	
Beijing	Showers	35° / 16°	
Hong Kong	Showers	58° / 52°	
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	80° / 68°	
London	Cloudy	39° / 26°	
Los Angeles	Showers	58° / 49°	
Manila	Showers	83° / 76°	
Melbourne	Mostly Cloudy	84° / 68°	
Miami	Sunny	65° / 51°	
New York	Partly Cloudy	40° / 29°	
Osaka	Showers	51° / 37°	
Paris	Light Rain	45° / 37°	
Busan	Partly Cloudy	45° / 30°	
Rome	Rain	56° / 51°	
Salem	Sunny	58° / 31°	
San Francisco	Rain	55° / 47°	
Seoul	Sunny	30° / 14°	
Tokyo	Showers	48° / 36°	
Washington, DC	Sunny	46° / 27°	

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY			FEET
2:30 AM	High Tide	1.13	
7:38 AM	Low Tide	0.76	
1:53 PM	High Tide	1.64	
9:26 PM	Low Tide	0.07	

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 17, 2023

DEPARTURES				ARRIVALS			
SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)				GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN			
UA117	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily	UA174	8:00AM	8:46AM	Daily
SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)				NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN			
UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5	UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7
GUAM-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-GUAM			
PR 111	5:30AM	7:25AM	Daily	PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau	UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
UA183	8:00PM	9:50PM	Daily	UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
				UA189	12:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)				MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN			
UA117/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam	UA189/174	12:40AM	8:46AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA117/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau	UA184/174	10:55PM	8:46AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via Guam
OZ624/701	3:50PM	10:35AM+1	3, 6 via Incheon	UA192/174	10:40PM	8:46AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
				OZ704/623	11:50PM	2:20PM+1	2, 5 via Incheon
SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)				INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN			
TW308	3:15AM	6:55AM	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7	OZ623	9:00AM	2:20PM	3, 6
TW9308	3:30AM	7:10AM	2, 4	7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
OZ624	3:50PM	7:40PM	3, 6	TW307	8:45PM	2:15AM+1	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily	TW9307	9:00PM	2:30AM+1	1, 5

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. (The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

MARIANAS SOUTHERN AIRWAYS

INITIAL DAILY FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF AUGUST 18, 2022

SAIPAN TO TINIAN			TINIAN TO SAIPAN		
DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
7:00 A.M.	7:15 A.M.	(Except Sundays)	7:35 A.M.	7:50 A.M.	(Except Sundays)
9:50 A.M.	10:05 A.M.		10:25 A.M.	10:40 A.M.	
4:00 P.M.	4:15 P.M.	(Except Saturdays)	4:35 P.M.	4:50 P.M.	(Except Saturdays)
SAIPAN TO ROTA			ROTA TO SAIPAN		
DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
8:10 A.M.	8:40 A.M.		9:00 A.M.	9:30 A.M.	
1:45 P.M.	2:15 P.M.		2:35 P.M.	3:05 P.M.	
SAIPAN TO GUAM			GUAM TO SAIPAN		
DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
11:10 A.M.	12:00 P.M.		12:30 P.M.	1:20 P.M.	
5:15 P.M.	6:05 P.M.		6:40 P.M.	7:30 P.M.	

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JUNE 1, 2022

SAIPAN TO ROTA				ROTA TO SAIPAN			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	8:30	9:00	Daily	3101	9:30	10:00	Daily
1302	11:00	11:30	Mon/Wed/Fri	3102	13:00	13:30	Tues/Thurs/Sat/Sun
1302	12:00	12:30	Tues/Thurs/Sat/Sun	3102	14:00	14:30	Mon/Wed/Fri
1303	15:30	16:00	Daily	3103	16:30	17:00	Daily
ROTA TO GUAM				GUAM TO ROTA			
LIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	12:00	12:30	Mon/Wed/Fri	4301	13:00	13:30	Mon/Wed/Fri
SAIPAN TO TINIAN				TINIAN TO SAIPAN			
FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY	FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1202	8:00	8:15	Daily	2102	8:30	8:45	Daily
1203	9:00	9:15	Daily	2103	9:30	9:45	Daily
1204	10:00	10:15	Daily	2104	10:30	10:45	Daily
1208	14:00	14:15	Daily	2108	14:30	14:45	Daily
1209	15:00	15:15	Daily	2109	15:30	15:45	Daily
1210	16:00	16:15	Daily	2110	16:30	16:45	Daily
1211	17:00	17:15	Daily	2111	17:30	17:45	Daily

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Business

Satisfy your sweet tooth at Sweet Lane

By **LEIGH GASES**

leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Willie Wonka had his chocolate factory, but now on Saipan, Ashlyn Lee has her Sweet Lane Pâtisserie where you can satisfy your sweet tooth cravings with her delicious desserts.

Specializing in French-inspired desserts, you can find in this newly opened pâtisserie, or bakeshop: macarons, tiramisu, madeleines, s'more cookies, financier, canelé, brownies, dacquoise, and crème brûlée.

Pair it up with freshly brewed Illy coffee, fresh fruit ade, or tea from the Dilmah T Series, and you have your perfect sweet tooth fix.

For those who are unfamiliar with some of these desserts, a macaron is a sweet meringue-based French cookie with buttercream filling.

A financier is a small French almond cake that is light and moist with a crisp, eggshell-like exterior, usually baked in a small mold; a canelé is a small French pastry flavored with rum and vanilla with a soft and tender custard center and a dark, thick caramelized crust; and a dacquoise is a dessert cake made with layers of almond and hazelnut meringue and whipped cream or buttercream on a buttery biscuit base.

Originally from South Korea, 28-year-old owner and pâtissier, or baker, "Ashlyn" Chae Young Lee, has made it



LEIGH GASES

Twenty-eight-year-old owner and pâtissier, or baker, "Ashlyn" Chae Young Lee poses with her dessert shop, Sweet Lane Pâtisserie, which is in the same building as the Naked Fish Bar & Grill in Garapan across the American Memorial Park parking lot.



LEIGH GASES

Macarons, crème brûlée, tiramisu, and brownies as seen here are just some of the tasty desserts available at the Sweet Lane Pâtisserie.



LEIGH GASES

Macarons of different flavors are available to satisfy your sweet tooth at the Sweet Lane Pâtisserie in Garapan.

her life's work to create tasty desserts. At a young age, she took up an interest and passion in baking as she watched her mom bake home-made goods, and eventually, she studied baking and confectionery at the Suwon Women's University, then worked at 5-star hotels in Korea to perfect her skills, and eventually moved to Saipan in 2019.

Lee initially had no intention of starting a business, but said that her friends convinced her to open a shop because they loved the sweet treats that she baked which reminded them of the desserts in Korea, so Lee decided to give it a go. Sweet Lane opened last Dec. 1, 2022.

She said that desserts on Saipan are different from Korea—and with her shop—she wants everyone to try out the

authentic French and Korean desserts that she bakes herself.

You can dine in and savor the tasty sweets, have a chat with your friends, and even take an Instagram boomerang of your treat with the fresh flower centerpieces on the tables. Don't forget to follow them and tag them on Instagram @SweetLane_Saipan

Need a present for a loved one or coworker? You can choose any combination of desserts and they will wrap it up for you in an elegant treat box—you even get to choose a fancy bow—just pay for the desserts you chose.

Sweet Lane is located in the same building as the Naked Fish Bar & Grill in Garapan across the American Memorial Park parking lot. Operation hours are from Monday to Saturday, from 11 am to 5:30 pm.

Buttigieg finds himself in the spotlight for better or worse

WASHINGTON (AP)—The nation's transportation secretary usually holds one of the most public-facing roles in any presidential administration. A core aspect of the Cabinet job is to travel the country, doling out millions of public dollars and attending ribbon-cutting ceremonies for new bridges and overpasses and ports.

Even by those standards, Pete Buttigieg has spent an inordinate amount of time in the national spotlight delivering the largesse of the big infrastructure and domestic spending bills. But at the same time, the 2020 Democratic presidential candidate and onetime mayor of South Bend, Indiana, also has been the public face of a string of transportation-related crises, all amid steady speculation about his future political prospects.

During the 40-year-old Buttigieg's tenure, there have been widespread global sup-

ply chain issues and logjams at major ports, multiple instances of mass flight cancellations by airlines and a narrowly avoided nationwide strike by railroad workers that was only averted by an eleventh-hour intervention from Congress.

The latest transportation mishap was the most high-profile yet.

On Wednesday morning, a malfunction in an obscure and apparently obsolete internal system called the Notice to Air Missions, or NOTAM, forced the temporary grounding of all air traffic in the United States. The move touched off a cascading snarl that resulted in the cancellation of more than 1,300 flights and the delay of 9,000 more. It was the biggest shutdown of U.S. aviation since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Faced with a historic system failure, Buttigieg appeared to lean into his role as the face of the beleaguered American

transportation network.

Appearing Wednesday at a Transportation Research Board conference, Buttigieg jumped right into the airline debacle before anyone could ask.

He called it "another challenging day for U.S. aviation" and said his department was "now pivoting to understanding the cause of the issue."

"We're gonna own it," Buttigieg later told reporters.

Earlier that day, during an interview with CNN, Buttigieg offered a positive spin, saying that "part of what you saw this morning was an act of caution."

But he also acknowledged that the mishap had exposed a desperate need to modernize crucial and antiquated systems.

"We need to design a system that does not have these kinds of vulnerabilities," he said.

Buttigieg's challenges earn a special kind of sympathy from those who have sat

in the same seat.

Ray LaHood, a former Republican congressman from Illinois who served as transportation secretary for four years under President Barack Obama, said he met with Buttigieg for 90 minutes shortly after Buttigieg was nominated by President Joe Biden.

"I told him, 'When you walk in the door and turn the lights on, there's going to be a crisis. And every day there'll be one or more,'" LaHood said. "When something goes wrong, you become the face of it."

In his two years on the job, Buttigieg has repeatedly criticized U.S. airlines for chronic cancellations and shoddy customer service—making Wednesday's debacle particularly awkward. It also highlighted the fact that the Federal Aviation Administration has been without a Senate-confirmed leader for nearly a year.

Airlines back more spending, staff to fix failed FAA system

DALLAS (AP)—Airline executives bristled last year when government officials, led by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, blamed the carriers for causing thousands of flight cancellations and mistreating their customers.

The shoe is on the other foot now after a technology outage at the Federal Aviation Administration grounded planes for a time earlier this week, but airline leaders are taking a different tack.

They've avoided harsh words and score-settling. Instead they're calling on Congress and the Biden administration to give the FAA more staff and more money to upgrade its systems.

"The FAA, I know, is doing the very best they can with what they have, but we need to stand behind the FAA," Delta Air Lines CEO Ed Bastian said Friday.

American Airlines CEO Robert Isom praised the

FAA for "calling a time out" Wednesday morning—temporarily barring planes nationwide from taking off—while it fixed a system that provides safety and other information to pilots and airline dispatchers. He said it showed that safety comes first.

"Investment is required," Isom told CNBC. "It's going to be billions of dollars, and it's not something that is done overnight."

The airline executives, of course, have an interest in making sure that the FAA can function. The agency manages the nation's airspace and hires air traffic controllers who must juggle a mix of passenger and cargo jets, smaller private planes, helicopters and drones.

Bastian said the FAA's lack of adequate staffing is causing longer flight times and making it harder to operate in congested parts of the Northeast and Florida.

Nation

As tornadoes hit, survivors hid in tubs, shipping container

MARBURY, Ala. (AP)—An Alabama engine mechanic took refuge in a shipping container as a tornado from a violent storm decimated his shop and killed two of his neighbors along its destructive path across Alabama and Georgia.

The harrowing stories of David Hollon and other survivors of Thursday's storm are emerging as residents comb through the wreckage wrought by tornadoes and blistering winds that have led to the deaths of at least nine people.

In Alabama's rural Autauga County, where at least seven people have died, Hollon and his workers saw a massive tornado churning toward them. They needed to get to shelter — immediately.

Hollon said they ran into a metal shipping container near the back of his garage because the container had been anchored to the floor with concrete. Once inside, Hollon began frantically dialing his neighbor on the phone. But as they heard the garage being ripped apart by the storm, the call kept going to voicemail.

The storm passed and they emerged, only to find the body of his neighbor in the street, he said. Another neighbor up the road had also died, a family member said.

"I guess we did a lot better than most. We got damage, but we're still here," Hollon, 52, said in an interview Saturday



Debris stretches across a field after a tornado that ripped through Central Alabama earlier this week along County Road 140 where loss of life occurred Saturday, Jan. 14, 2023, in White City, Autauga County, Ala.

as he walked amidst the remains of his garage, stepping through a field littered with battered cars, shattered glass, snapped tree branches, splintered wood and other debris.

Leighea Johnson, a 54-year-old cafeteria worker who also lives in Autauga County, stood among the strewn remains of her trailer home. She pointed to a tall pile of rubble that she identified as her bedroom, bathroom and kitchen.

A swing set she had in her backyard was now across the street, mangled among some trees. Her outdoor trampoline

had been wrapped around another set of trees in a neighbor's front yard.

"The trailer should be here, and now it's not," Johnson said, pointing to a slab covered in debris. "And it is all over the place now."

The storm brought powerful twisters and winds to Alabama and Georgia that uprooted trees, sent mobile homes airborne, derailed a freight train, flipped cars, cracked utility poles and downed power lines, leaving thousands without electricity. Suspected tornado damage was reported

in at least 14 counties in Alabama and 14 counties in Georgia, according to the National Weather Service.

Autauga County officials said the tornado had winds of at least 136 mph (218 kph) and leveled damage consistent with an EF3, two steps below the most powerful category of twister. County authorities have said at least a dozen people were hospitalized and about 40 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, including mobile homes that were launched into the air.

Residents described chaotic scenes as the storm spun toward them. People rushed into shelters, bathtubs and sheds as the winds bore down. In one case, a search crew found five people, trapped but unharmed, inside a storm shelter after a wall from a nearby house fell onto it.

Downtown Selma sustained severe damage before the worst of the weather moved across Georgia south of Atlanta. No deaths were reported in Selma.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp said the damage was felt across his state. Some of the worst reports emerged from Troup County near the Georgia-Alabama line, where more than 100 homes were hit.

Kemp said a state transportation department worker was killed while responding to storm damage. A 5-year-old child who was riding in a vehicle was killed by a falling tree in Georgia's Butts County, authorities said. At least 12 people were treated at a hospital in Spalding County, south of Atlanta, where the weather service confirmed at least two tornadoes struck.

Storm-battered California gets more wind, rain and snow

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Storm-battered California got more wind, rain and snow on Saturday, raising flooding concerns, causing power outages and making travel dangerous.

Bands of rain with gusty winds started in the north and spread south, with more storms expected to follow into early next week, the National Weather Service said.

More than 68,000 utility customers were without electricity Saturday morning, a number that was cut by more than half during the afternoon, according to poweroutage.us.

Flood warnings were issued for the region north of San Francisco Bay, including Marin, Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties.

To the south, warnings were posted for parts of counties including San Mateo and Santa Cruz, where the tiny community of Felton Grove along the San Lorenzo River was ordered evacuated. An evacuation order also was issued for residents of the Wilton area in semirural southeastern Sacramento County. Authorities cited the threat of flooding from the Cosumnes River.

The swollen Salinas River swamped farmland in Monterey County, and to the east, flood warnings were in effect for Merced County in the

Johnson, the cafeteria worker in Autauga County, said she was at work when she learned the storm would pass directly over her home. She quickly warned her daughter, who was with her 2-year-old grandson at home.

"I called my daughter and said, 'You do not have time to get out, you've got to get somewhere now,'" Johnson said, her voice cracking. "And she said, 'I'm getting in the tub. If the house is messed up I'll be in the tub area.'"

The call dropped. Johnson kept calling back. When she finally reconnected with her daughter, Johnson said she told her: "The house is gone, the house is gone."

Her daughter and grandson had some cuts and bruises but were otherwise fine after a trip to the emergency room, Johnson said.

"I brought her home and tried not to let go of her after that," Johnson said. "I lost a lot of things materialistically and I don't have insurance but I don't even care, because my child is all right."

"That's really all that matters to me."

agricultural Central Valley, where Gov. Gavin Newsom visited to take stock of storm problems.

"The reality is that this is just the eighth of what we anticipate will be nine atmospheric rivers — we're not done," Newsom said at a briefing with local leaders where he urged people to be vigilant about safety for the next 24 to 48 hours.

"This is happening all across California but I want to say ... you guys are disproportionately taking the brunt of it, and if you feel that way you're right," Newsom said.

Slick roads, snow and whiteout conditions plagued highways through the Sierra Nevada.

The UC Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab tweeted Saturday morning that it received 21.3 inches (54 centimeters) of snow in 24 hours and that its snowpack of about 10 feet (3 meters) was expected to grow several more feet by Monday.

A backcountry avalanche warning was issued for the central Sierra, including the greater Lake Tahoe area.

A series of atmospheric rivers has dumped rain and snow on California since late December, cutting power to thousands, swamping roads, unleashing debris flows, and triggering landslides.

More classified documents found at Biden's home by lawyers

WASHINGTON (AP)—Lawyers for President Joe Biden found more classified documents at his home in Wilmington, Delaware, than previously known, the White House acknowledged Saturday.

White House lawyer Richard Sauber said in a statement that a total of six pages of classified documents were found during a search of Biden's private library. The White House had said previously that only a single page was found there.

The latest disclosure is in addition to the discovery of documents found in December in Biden's garage and in November at his former offices at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, from his time as vice president. The apparent mishandling of classified documents and official records from the Obama administration is under investigation by a former U.S. attorney, Robert Hur, who was appointed as a special counsel on Thursday by Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Sauber said in a statement

Saturday that Biden's personal lawyers, who did not have security clearances, stopped their search after finding the first page on Wednesday evening. Sauber found the remaining material Thursday, as he was facilitating their retrieval by the Department of Justice.

"While I was transferring it to the DOJ officials who accompanied me, five additional pages with classification markings were discovered among the material with it, for a total of six pages," Sauber said. "The DOJ officials with me immediately took possession of them."

Sauber has previously said that the White House was "confident that a thorough review will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced, and the president and his lawyers acted promptly upon discovery of this mistake."

Sauber's statement did not explain why the White House waited two days to provide an updated accounting of the number of classified records.

The White House is already facing scrutiny for waiting more than two months to acknowledge the discovery of the initial group of documents at the Biden office.

On Thursday, asked whether Biden could guarantee that additional classified documents would not turn up in a further search, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters, "You should assume that it's been completed, yes."

Sauber reiterated Saturday that the White House would cooperate with Hur's investigation.

Bob Bauer, the president's personal lawyer, said his legal team has "attempted to balance the importance of public transparency where appropriate with the established norms and limitations necessary to protect the investigation's integrity."

The Justice Department historically imposes a high legal bar before bringing criminal charges in cases involving the mishandling of classified information, with a require-

ment that someone intended to break the law as opposed to being merely careless or negligent in doing so. The primary statute governing the illegal removal and retention of classified documents makes it a crime to "knowingly" remove classified documents and store them in an unauthorized way.

The circumstances involving Biden, at least as so far known, differ from a separate investigation into the mishandling of classified documents at former President Donald Trump's private club and residence in Florida.

In Trump's case, special counsel Jack Smith is investigating whether anyone sought to obstruct their investigation into the retention of classified records at the Palm Beach estate. Justice Department officials have said Trump's representatives failed to fully comply with a subpoena that sought the return of classified records, prompting agents to return to the home with a search warrant so they could collect additional materials.

Asia

China reports 60,000 COVID-related deaths, says peak passed

BEIJING (AP)—China on Saturday reported nearly 60,000 deaths in people who had COVID-19 since early December, offering hard numbers for an unprecedented surge that was apparent in overcrowded hospitals and packed crematoriums, even as the government released little data about the status of the pandemic for weeks.

Those numbers may still underestimate the toll, though the government said the “emergency peak” of its latest surge appears to have passed.

The toll included 5,503 deaths due to respiratory failure caused by COVID-19 and 54,435 fatalities from other ailments combined with COVID-19 since Dec. 8, the National Health Commission announced. It said those “deaths related to COVID” occurred in hospitals, which means anyone who died at home would not be included in the numbers.

The report would more than double China’s official COVID-19 death toll to 10,775 since the disease was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019. China has counted only deaths from pneumonia or respiratory failure in its official COVID-19 death toll, a narrow definition that excludes many deaths that would be attributed to COVID-19 in much of the world.

China stopped reporting data on COVID-19 deaths and

infections after abruptly lifting anti-virus controls in early December despite a surge in infections that began in October and has filled hospitals with feverish, wheezing patients. Hospitals in Beijing across the country have been overwhelmed with patients, and funeral homes and crematoriums have struggled to handle the dead.

The World Health Organization and other governments appealed for information after reports by city and provincial governments suggested as many as hundreds of millions of people in China might have contracted the virus.

Infection numbers now appear to be falling based on a decline in the number of patients visiting fever clinics, said a National Health Commission official, Jiao Yahui.

The daily number of people going to those clinics peaked at 2.9 million on Dec. 23 and had fallen by 83% to 477,000 on Thursday, according to Jiao.

“These data show the national emergency peak has passed,” Jiao said at a news conference.

Whether China truly has passed a COVID-19 peak is hard to assess, said Dr. Dale Bratzler, chief COVID officer at the University of Oklahoma and head of quality control at the university’s hospital.

“That’s difficult to know,” Bratzler said. “China quarantined people indoors, there are

many people unvaccinated, the people are vulnerable.”

Dr. Albert Ko, an infectious disease physician and professor of public health at the Yale School of Public Health, said the number of COVID-19 deaths China is reporting may be a “significant underestimation” because of how they define them.

“They’re using a very narrow case definition for (COVID) deaths,” Ko said. “They have to have respiratory failure ... in order to be counted as a case you have to be at a place where they can say you fulfilled all the requirements, and that’s at a hospital.”

Hospitals in China, Ko said, are located mostly in large cities where COVID outbreaks have been reported, not in isolated rural areas.

“This is the Lunar New Year, people are traveling, going to the countryside where the population is vulnerable,” Ko said. “We’re really worried about what’s going to happen in China as this outbreak moves to the countryside.”

For nearly three years, China had kept its infection rate and deaths far lower than those of the United States and some other countries at the height of the pandemic with a “zero-COVID” strategy that aimed to isolate every case. That shut down access to some cities, kept millions of people at home and sparked angry protests.

Taliban ban on female aid workers poses big dilemma for US

WASHINGTON (AP)—For an idled worker at a Kabul-based aid group, Abaad, that helps abused Afghan women, frightened and often tearful calls are coming in, not only from her clients but also from her female colleagues.

A Dec. 24 order from the Taliban barring aid groups from employing women is paralyzing deliveries that help keep millions of Afghans alive, and threatening humanitarian services countrywide. As another result of the ban, thousands of women who work for such organizations across the war-battered country are facing the loss of income they desperately need to feed their own families.

The prohibition is posing one of the biggest policy challenges over Afghanistan for the United States and other countries since the U.S. military withdrawal in August 2021 opened the door for the

Taliban takeover. Those nations face the difficult task of crafting an international response that neither further worsens the plight of millions of aid-dependent Afghans nor caves in to the Taliban’s crack-down on women.

The United Nations estimates that 85% of nongovernmental aid organizations in Afghanistan have partially or fully shut down operations because of the ban, which is the Taliban’s latest step to drive women from public life.

Abaad was among those suspending its work. Its female employees provided support and counseling to women who endured rape, beatings, forced marriages or other domestic abuse.

Female clients told the Abaad worker that without the group’s help, they fear they will wind up on Kabul’s streets. For the worker herself and for thousands like

her across Afghanistan, they depend on their paychecks to survive in a broken economy where aid officials say 97% of the population is now in poverty or at risk of it.

One colleague told her she was contemplating suicide.

The aid worker and others interviewed expressed hope that the United States, the United Nations and others will stand by them and persuade the Taliban to relent on the ban.

“That’s all we ask. They should find a solution, find a way to support people here in Afghanistan,” she said. She spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of her safety.

Several leading global aid organizations that have suspended operations are urging U.N. aid agencies to do the same. They are asking the Biden administration to use its influence to ensure the international community stands firm.

World

UK to supply tanks; Russian missiles hit across Ukraine



In this photo released by the Dnipro Regional Administration, smoke rises after a Russian rocket hit a multistory building leaving many people under debris in Dnipro, Ukraine, Saturday, Jan. 14, 2023.

LONDON (AP)—U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Saturday promised to provide tanks and artillery systems to Ukraine, amid renewed missile attacks by Moscow targeting multiple Ukrainian cities for the first time in nearly two weeks.

Nine people were killed and 64 others wounded in the southeastern city of Dnipro, where a Russian missile strike destroyed a section of an apartment building, said Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian presidential office.

Infrastructure facilities were also hit in the western Lviv region and Ivano-Frankivsk regions, in the Odesa region on the Black Sea and in northeastern Kharkiv. Kyiv, the capital, was also targeted.

Sunak made the pledge to provide Challenger 2 tanks and other artillery systems after speaking to Ukrainian Presi-

dent Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday, the British leader’s Downing Street office said in a statement.

It didn’t say when the tanks would be delivered or how many. British media have reported that four British Army Challenger 2 main battle tanks will be sent to Eastern Europe immediately, with eight more to follow shortly after, without citing sources.

Zelenskyy tweeted his thanks to Sunak on Saturday “for the decisions that will not only strengthen us on the battlefield, but also send the right signal to other partners.”

Ukraine has for months sought to be supplied with heavier tanks, including the U.S. Abrams and the German Leopard 2 tanks, but Western leaders have been treading carefully.

The Czech Republic and Poland have provided Sovi-

et-era T-72 tanks to Ukrainian forces. Poland has also expressed readiness to provide a company of Leopard tanks, but President Andrzej Duda stressed during his recent visit to the Ukrainian city of Lviv that the move would be possible only as an element in a larger international coalition of tank aid to Kyiv.

Earlier this month, France said it would send AMX-10 RC armored combat vehicles to Ukraine, designated “light tanks” in French. The U.S. and Germany announced the same week that they would send Bradley fighting vehicles and Marder armored personnel carriers, respectively, for the first time.

Sunak’s announcement came as Russian forces fired missiles at Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine on Saturday in the first major barrage in days.

WORLD BRIEFS

Iran hangs Iranian-British ex-defense official for spy claim

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—Iran said Saturday it executed a former high-ranking defense ministry official and dual Iranian-British national, despite international warnings not to carry out the death sentence. The execution further escalated tensions with the West amid the nationwide anti-government protests shaking the Islamic Republic.

The hanging of Ali Reza Akbari, a close ally of top security official Ali Shamkhani, suggests an ongoing power struggle within Iran’s theocracy as it tries to contain the demonstrations over the Sep-

tember death of Mahsa Amini. It also harkened back to the mass purges of the military that immediately followed Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Akbari’s hanging drew immediate anger from London, which along with the U.S. and others has sanctioned Iran over the protests and its supplying Russia with the bomb-carrying drones now targeting Ukraine.

Thousands protest in Germany against coal mine expansion

ERKELENZ, Germany (AP)—Thousands of people demonstrated in persistent rain on Saturday to protest the clearance and demolition of a village in western Germany

that is due to make way for the expansion of a coal mine. There were standoffs with police as some protesters tried to reach the edge of the mine and the village itself.

Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg joined the demonstrators as they protested the clearance of Luetzerath, walking through the nearby village of Keyenberg and past muddy fields. Protesters chanted “Every village stays” and “You are not alone.”

Organizers said about 35,000 people took part, while police put the figure at 15,000. On the sidelines of the protest, police said people broke through their barriers and some got into the Garzweiler coal mine.

Health & Wellness

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Cries for help pour into 988 mental health, suicide line

HYATTSVILLE, Md. (AP)—When Jamieson Brill answers a crisis call from a Spanish speaker on the newly launched national 988 mental health helpline, he rarely mentions the word suicide, or “suicidio.”

Brill, whose family hails from Puerto Rico, knows that just discussing the term in some Spanish-speaking cultures is so frowned upon that many callers are too scared to even admit that they’re calling for themselves.

“However strong stigma around mental health concerns is in English-speaking cultures, in Spanish-speaking cultures it is triple that,” said Brill, who helps people navigate mental health crises from a tiny brick building tucked away in Hyattsville, Maryland.

Brill works in one of more than 200 call centers fanned out around the country tasked with answering an uptick in calls day and night from people considering suicide or experiencing a mental health emergency.

With bipartisan congressional support and just under \$1 billion in federal funds, the 988 mental health helpline has quickly expanded its reach in the six months since it launched—with over 2 million calls, texts and chat messages pouring in.

The number of centers answering calls in Spanish grew from three to seven last year. A



988 Call Center Director Jamieson Brill poses for a photo in front of a desk where work workers take calls around the clock at a facility in Hyattsville, Md., Oct. 7, 2022.

pilot line dedicated to LGBTQ youth started taking calls in September. And plans are underway to keep the momentum going, with the federal government adding Spanish language chat and text options later this year and aiming to expand those services to a 24/7 operation for the LGBTQ line.

When the around-the-clock service launched last summer, it built on the existing network that staffed the old national lifeline, 1-800-273-8255. The new 988 number is designed to be as

easy to remember as 911.

It couldn’t have come at a more needed time: Depression rates in U.S. adults, overdose deaths and suicide rates have been on the rise.

“The call volume is, in some

instances, well beyond what we anticipated,” said Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, assistant secretary for mental health and substance use in the Department of Health and Human Services. “It does let us know that people

are struggling, people are having a hard time. Where I feel heartened is that people are getting connected to services and supports, as opposed to struggling on their own.”

The 988 helpline registered 154,585 more calls, texts and chat messages during November 2022 compared to the old national lifeline in November 2021, according to the latest data available.

Texting has been particularly popular, with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration noting a 1,227% increase in texts to the line during that same time.

The Veterans Crisis Line—callers can press “1” after texting or calling 988 to reach it—has fielded 450,000 calls, texts and chat messages, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. By the end of the year, the line had handled a nearly 10% increase compared to 2021.

Calls show no signs of slowing into this year, with counselors answering 3,869 calls

on New Year’s Eve and the first day of 2023—a 30 percent increase compared to the previous holiday. The Spanish language line saw an increase of 3,800 calls year over year from November 2021 to November 2022.

Meanwhile, some states are considering unveiling their own lines dedicated to certain communities.

In November, Washington became the first state to launch a mental health crisis line dedicated to American Indian and Alaska Native people. Callers in Washington can reach the line by calling 988 then pressing “4” to be greeted by one of the 13 counselors—all Indigenous people—who staff the phones.

Having fellow American Indians answer those calls is crucial, because those familiar with the culture can immediately decode some terms that others cannot, said Rochelle Williams, the tribal operations manager for Volunteers of America Western Washington, which oversees the call center.

Worst cholera outbreak in decades kills 750 people in Malawi

BLANTYRE, Malawi (AP)—The worst cholera outbreak to affect Malawi in two decades has now claimed 750 lives, a government minister said, while the World Health Organization chief described the southeast African country as among the hardest-hit amid ongoing global epidemics that are “more widespread and deadly than normal.”

Malawi’s Health Minister Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda on Thursday ordered the closure of many businesses that lack safe water, toilets and hygienic refuse disposal

facilities, and announced restrictions on the sale of pre-cooked food.

“We continue to record rising number of cases across the country, despite signs of reduced transmission and deaths in a few areas,” Chiponda said in a statement, and urged adherence to sanitation and hygiene measures.

On Wednesday, Chiponda said 17 people had died from 589 new cases of the water-borne disease “in the past 24 hours.” She said the country has recorded 22,759 cases since the onset of the outbreak

in March last year.

Figures show that about 15 people have been dying daily in recent days, with 155 deaths recorded in the past 10 days. Nearly 1,000 people were hospitalized as of Wednesday.

This week, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said 31 countries have reported cholera outbreaks since December, a 50% increase over previous years.

“While we have had large cholera outbreaks before, we have not seen such a large number of simultaneous out-

breaks,” Tedros said, adding that Malawi, along with Haiti and Syria, are among the worst-affected countries.

Last year, the WHO and its partners switched to a single dose of the standard cholera vaccine instead of the usual two doses, due to supply problems.

“Production is currently at maximum capacity, and despite this unprecedented decision, the stockpile remains very low,” Tedros said, adding that four more countries have asked for vaccines in the past few weeks.

Holidays didn’t lead to feared bump in flu cases, CDC says

NEW YORK (AP)—New U.S. government data suggests holiday gatherings didn’t spark surges in respiratory diseases.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday reported that visits to doctors’ offices for the flu-like illnesses fell for the sixth straight week. Reports of RSV, a common cause of cold-like symptoms that can be serious for infants and the elderly, are also down.

When flu and RSV surged in the fall, causing overloads at pediatric emergency rooms, some doctors feared that winter might bring a “triple” of flu, RSV and COVID-19. And they worried holiday gatherings might be the spark.

But it didn’t happen, apparently.

“Right now, everything continues to decline,” said the CDC’s Lynnette Brammer, who leads the government agency’s tracking of flu in the United States.

RSV hospitalizations have been going down since November, and flu hospitalizations are down, too.

Of course, the situation is uneven across the country, and some places have more illnesses than others. But some doctors say patient traffic is easing.

“It has really eased up, considerably,” said Dr. Ethan Wiener, a pediatric ER doctor at the Hassenfeld Children’s Hospital at NYU Langone in New York City.

Dr. Jason Newland, a pediatric infectious diseases physician at St. Louis Children’s Hospital in Missouri, said “it has slowed down, tremendously.”

Newland said he wasn’t surprised that flu and RSV continued to trend down in recent weeks, but added: “The question is what was COVID going to do?”

COVID-19 hospitalizations rose through December, including during the week after Christmas. One set of CDC data appears to show they started trending down after New Year’s, although an agency spokeswoman noted that another count indicates an uptick as of last week. Because of reporting lags it may be a few weeks until CDC can be sure COVID-19 hospitaliza-

tions have really started dropping, she said.

Newland said there was an increase in COVID-19 traffic at St. Louis Children’s in December. But he noted the situation was nothing like it was a year ago, when the then-new omicron variant was causing the largest national surge of COVID-19 hospitalizations since the pandemic began.

“That was the worst,” he said.

The fall RSV and flu surge was felt most acutely at health care centers for children. Wiener said the pediatric emergency department traffic at Hassenfeld was 50% above normal levels in October, November and December—the highest volumes ever—for that time of year, he said.

Healthy Living

Fructose

Fructose in fruit is a very sweet sugar; it is wrapped in fiber-filled flesh, which reduces its absorption in the body.

The other fructose

- **High fructose corn syrup**, made by upping the fructose level in corn syrup, is used to sweeten soft drinks, packaged baked goods
- **It is processed by the liver**, where it can be changed into fat
- **It has been linked to obesity**, other health problems

Source: Science 2.0,
Graphic: Staff, TNS



Life & Style

Lisa Marie Presley will be buried at Graceland next to son

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—Lisa Marie Presley will be buried at Graceland, the famed home of Elvis Presley that on Friday became a gathering place for fans distraught over her death a day earlier.

The singer-songwriter's final resting place will be next to her son, Benjamin Keough, who died in 2020, said a representative of her daughter and actor Riley Keough. Elvis and other members of the Presley family are also buried at Graceland.

Fans paid their respects at Graceland's gates on Friday, writing messages on the stone wall, leaving flowers and sharing memories of Elvis Presley's only child, who was one of the last remaining touchstones to the icon whose influence and significance still resonates more than 45 years after his own sudden death.

Lisa Marie Presley, 54, died Thursday, hours after being hospitalized for a medical emergency.

A singer-songwriter her-

self, Lisa Marie did not live in Memphis, where she was born. But she made trips to the city for celebrations of her father's birth anniversary and commemorations of his death, which stunned the world when he was found dead in his Graceland home at age 42 on Aug. 16, 1977. She was in Memphis just this past Sunday, on what would have been her father's 88th birthday.

Angela Ferraro was among those on Thursday night who stopped by Graceland, where the trees in the front lawn were adorned by green and red lights. Fans took photos and left flowers at the front gate on the chilly and windy evening.

Ferraro and her fiancé drove 25 minutes from Olive Branch, Mississippi, to pay their respects. Ferraro said she was a fan of Elvis' music and of Lisa Marie's—the couple listened to Lisa Marie's song "Lights Out" on the drive north to Graceland.

"Elvis died young, and so did she. And her son, his pass-

courtroom on Friday.

He now faces a dozen charges relating to four men between 2001 and 2013.

His trial is due to start on June 6 and last for three to four weeks. It is likely to be at the Old Bailey, the venue for Britain's highest-profile criminal trials.

Spacey, who has addresses in London and the U.S., was granted bail and allowed to return to the United States after a preliminary hearing in June.



Lisa Marie Presley stands next to her childhood crib displayed with other mementos in the new exhibit "Elvis Through His Daughter's Eyes," at Graceland in Memphis, Tenn., Jan. 31, 2012.

ing was very tragic as well," said Ferraro, 32. "It's hard and it's devastating."

Lisa Marie became the sole heir of the Elvis Presley Trust, which—along with Elvis Presley Enterprises—managed Graceland and other assets until she sold her majority interest in 2005. She retained ownership of the mansion itself, the 13 acres around it and items inside the home.

A representative from Elvis Presley Enterprises told The Associated Press that the mansion is in a trust that will go to the benefit of her children—she's survived by three daughters. The representative did not have details on the timing of a funeral or burial.

Andrew Tate case: Romania tows luxury cars, other assets

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP)—Romanian authorities descended on a compound near Bucharest on Saturday to tow away a fleet of luxury cars and other assets worth an estimated \$3.9 million in the case investigating Andrew Tate, the divisive social media personality who is detained in the

country on charges of human trafficking.

Romania's National Agency for the Administration of Unavailable Assets said in a statement that it removed a total of 15 luxury cars, 14 designer watches and cash in several currencies. The total value of the goods, the agency

said, is estimated at 3.6 million euros (\$3.9 million).

About a half-dozen masked law enforcement officers and other officials descended on the compound Saturday to take away the goods. The fleet of automobiles included a blue Rolls-Royce, a Ferrari, a Porsche, a BMW, an Aston

Martin and a Mercedes-Benz.

Tate, 36, a British-U.S. citizen who has 4.5 million followers on Twitter, was arrested on Dec. 29 in Bucharest along with his brother Tristan and two Romanian women on charges of being part of an organized crime group, human trafficking and rape.

Actor Ezra Miller gets fine, probation after home break-in

Actor Ezra Miller pleaded guilty Friday to a charge stemming from a break-in and theft of alcohol at a neighbor's home in Vermont, one of a string of arrests and reports of erratic behavior last year that stretched from Hawaii to New England.

Miller, who appeared in several "Justice League" movies and stars in the upcoming film "The Flash," agreed that by

entering the plea and abiding by the conditions, they would avoid a three-month jail sentence for a misdemeanor charge of unlawful trespass, but pay a \$500 fine and a court fee, get a year of probation, and abide by a number



Miller

of conditions including continued mental health treatment.

Two other charges were dropped, including a felony burglary count that could have carried a sentence of 25 years in prison, but Vermont Superior Court Judge Kerry Ann

McDonald-Cady told Miller the felony charge could be refiled if they fail to abide by the details of probation.

During the nearly 30-minute hearing in Bennington, Miller, 30, answered the judge's questions but declined to make a statement. However, after the hearing, Miller's attorney, Lisa Shelkrot, sent a statement on the actor's behalf.

Relative who abused child will be at get-togethers

DEAR ABBY: Years ago, my child was sexually abused by a relative. After I found out, I reported it, which made the abuser's family very upset. Charges were filed, and there were court dates, probation and counseling. To date, everything the judge required of the abuser has been legally fulfilled. While I'm glad everything was completed, I'm still not comfortable having him around my child or any of their younger siblings.

The extended family wants to have large gatherings like were held in the past, and they are so happy we can all be together again. Is it bad that I still don't want my child and other children around the abuser? Is it bad I don't want my child to have to spend every major holiday and celebration with their abuser in the same space?

It bothers me that everyone is celebrating the return of this pedophile and disregarding my child's feelings as if nothing ever happened. Am I wrong to feel this way? What's the best way to handle this?

SHELL-SHOCKED MOTHER IN COLORADO

DEAR SHELL-SHOCKED: You are not wrong. You are a loving, caring, vigilant and protective mother. The best way to handle this would be to forgo family gatherings at which the abuser will be present. A victim of sexual abuse should not be required to ever be in that person's presence again.

■■■■

DEAR ABBY: This may seem strange to complain about because most people would love to get flowers. My boyfriend of three years sends a dozen red roses every couple of months to my workplace. It's not related to a birthday or anniversary. It's "just because."

It would be fine if they were sent to our home, but sending them to my workplace makes it seem like he wants to send a message. It feels controlling somehow. I feel like a spectacle and uncomfortable. I don't want to say anything to him and hurt his feelings when he's trying to be nice, but I just want it to stop.

He thinks my late husband gave me flowers all the time because when we moved, I had 30 vases or more. But most of them were from bouquets I received after his death. Plus, when my late husband gave me flowers, it was usually after he did something hurtful. So yes, I do have a negative connotation about flowers. But still, saying something to him about stopping makes me as queasy as actually getting the flowers. Please help.

OVER-BLOSSOMED IN THE WEST

DEAR OVER-BLOSSOMED: Open your mouth! Your boyfriend is not a mind reader. Tell him everything you have written to me. He needs to know why you feel the way you do about receiving flowers, and also that sending them to your workplace is distracting and feels intrusive. If he feels he "must" give you a public demonstration of

DEAR ABBY BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



his adoration, he should make it a nice box of candy that everyone can enjoy.

■■■■

DEAR READERS: In the words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who in 1968 was martyred in the cause of civil rights, and whose birthday we remember today: "We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope."

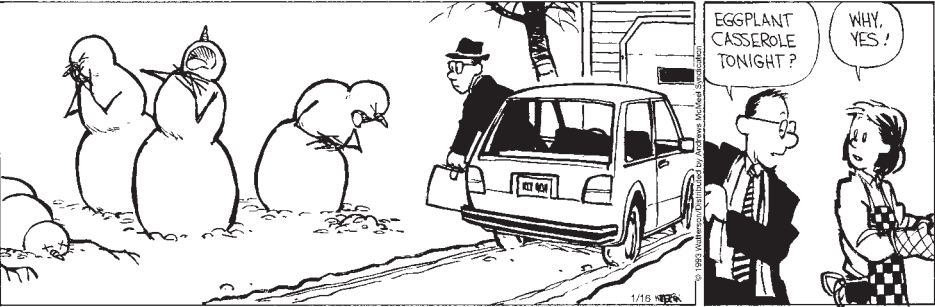
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Good advice for everyone – teens to seniors – is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for \$8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



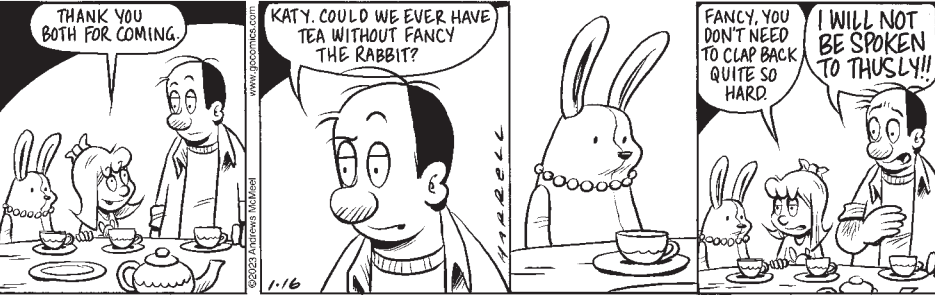
Garfield®

By Jim Davis



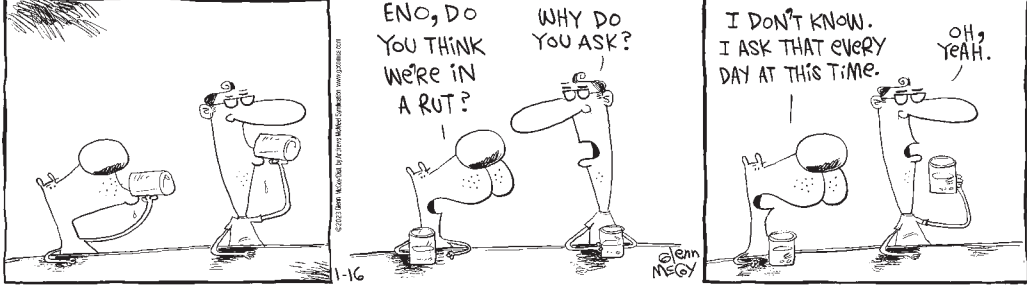
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset



The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Hiatus

4 LP speed

7 Expan-

sive

11 Wall St.

deals

13 Notre

Dame's

Par-

seghian

14 Hotel

chain

15 Slender

woodwind

16 Tofu

source

17 Towering

18 Room

sides

20 Laptop

connec-

tion

22 Actress

Farrow

24 Yankee

great

Mickey

28 Boat

race

32 Concur

33 Concept

34 "I Have a

Dream"

mono-

gram

36 Iranian

money

37 Buffalo

team

39 Multi-

tudes

DOWN

1 Radiate

2 "Mamma

Mia"

3 Combine

4 Univ.

dorm

5 Ship's

front

6 "Jeop-

ardly!"

7 Subject

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50 Early

Peruvian

53 Bit of

physics

55 Jog

56 Pal

57 Mel's

Diner

waitress

58 Missile

shelter

59 Exile isle

60 Hanker-

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61 Long

time

Solution time: 26 mins.

M	A	C	A	W	S	S	R	D	O	G
P	R	A	D	A	O	O	O	E	R	R
H	E	M	E	N	L	U	C	I	L	L
I	N	D	O	O	R	G	L	O	B	
D	S	L	A	C	E	D	E	A	N	E
O	K	L	A	A	D	M	I	T		
W	I	E	S	E	L	E	D	I	S	O
S	N	A	R	L		T	E	L	E	
P	A	N	I	C	A	B	U	V	E	T
E	T	A	S		S	C	A	M	P	I
O	R	V	I	L	L	E		P	O	L
N	I	E	A	R		E	L	L	I	E
S	A	L	A	B	S		D	E	E	R

Last Friday's Answer 01/16

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11			12		13			14	
15				16				17	
18				19		20		21	
		22		23		24		25	26
28	29	30			31		32		
33				34		35		36	
37				38		39		40	
41				42		43			
			44		45		46		47
50	51	52			53		54		55
56					57			58	
59					60				61

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Max Joseph, 41; Richard T. Jones, 51; Debbie Allen, 73; John Carpenter, 75.

Happy Birthday: Use whatever tools are available to you to bring about positive change. An energetic approach to life will attract individuals who are proactive and well-informed. Dedicate your time and what you have to offer to organizations that share your concerns. Playing with numbers and your budget will lead to financial gains. Protect your health and emotional well-being. Your numbers are 3, 8, 14, 23, 30, 38, 44.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Investigate the changes in your personal or professional community and decide if you want to participate or put your energy elsewhere. See who's involved and do your best to connect with people who share your vision. Peace and love are encouraged. ***

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Don't get caught up in someone else's dream. Know when to back away and do your own thing. Protect against being manipulated by someone who tends to exaggerate. Look for unique ways to offer help without going overboard. Leave nothing to chance. ***

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Don't take a risk with your health or emotional well-being. Keep situations in perspective, and distance yourself from trouble and erratic individuals trying to undermine you. Concentrate on personal improvements that will make your resume and the impression you make inviting. ***

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Take advantage of any opportunity to experience something new and exciting. Research a creative pursuit that intrigues you or get together with someone who makes you think about life and what you want to do next. Travel, education and deep discussions are favored. *****

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Be open to suggestions, but don't go overboard. Take on projects in increments to manage the cost and time to ensure you reach your objective. Offer to help someone who has something you find valuable; create a shared opportunity. **

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Network, gather information and change what isn't working for you. Branch out and explore your options. Consider subjects, activities and people who contribute most to your life, and reinvest time and money into personal growth and romance. Rebuild what's important to you. ****

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Take the initiative to learn something new. Sign up for a course or research the possibility of using your skills differently. Look for an opening that can change how much you earn or encourages you to be active. Physical fitness is encouraged. ***

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Stick to the truth and change only what makes sense to you. Trying to impress someone who is never satisfied is a waste of time. Set things up to suit your needs. Trying to buy love will leave you in a vulnerable position. ***

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Take the fast track and don't stop until you reach your destination. Keep your head down and your thoughts to yourself. You'll be misguided by someone looking to make a quick buck. Pay attention to the way you look. Dress to impress. ***

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Rely on your intuition. Take the time to put together a plan that encourages you to follow your passion, even if it means earning less. Peace of mind will make a difference in how you feel and who you enjoy being around. ****

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Don't hesitate when dealing with emotional issues. Carefully handle differences you have with others in order to avoid backlash. Be a good listener, and you'll know exactly how to respond to someone giving you a hard time. Take nothing for granted. **

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Position yourself for advancement. Speak up and be part of the solution, and you'll become the go-to person in your circle of friends. Don't let anger or outside interference mount when common sense is required. A financial gain is heading your way. *****

Birthday Baby: You are insightful, sensitive and disciplined. You are cooperative and energetic.

☾: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ☼: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ☿: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ♀: Aim high; start new projects. ♂: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

		9	3			4	7	
				8		5		2
7			4				8	1
5		1			2			
	7			3			9	
			5			6		3
9	6				1			7
2		7		6				
	1	5		7	8			

Friday's Answer

6	8	9	3	4	7	1	5	2
7	5	2	1	9	6	4	8	3
3	1	4	8	2	5	9	7	6
9	2	7	4	5	3	6	1	8
5	3	1	9	6	8	7	2	4
8	4	6	7	1	2	3	9	5
2	9	3	6	8	1	5	4	7
4	7	8	5	3	9	2	6	1
1	6	5	2	7	4	8	3	9

Difficulty Level ★

1/16

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

THE SUEZ CANAL

Solution: 9 letters

N W C I F F A R T H C A Y C R
O A D L A N E I S T H M U S K
I T E N O L S E A L E V E L I
T E G N I N R S R S S I I A F
C R Y M A W T E N E I O N T W
U W P R O R N G K R D A I E E
R A T R A I R I L N E S L M T
T Y R D A E E E A O A V E M R
S A E T G G T Y T R B T I A O
N A N D A Y U R R I G A D R P
O O I S S E O O A A D N L I S
C R S D H L R T V C A E G N N
B A D O O L F S E S P A M E A
P A R K R A S I L K R O A D R
L E S S E V E H I C L E S S T

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Asia, Bridge, Cairo, Construction, Container, Egypt, Flood, Global, Grain, History, Isthmus, Lane, Maps, Marine, Mediterranean, Metal, Mile, Narrow, Nile, Oil, Park, Passage, Red Sea, River, Route, Said, Sand, Sea Level, Shore, Silk Road, Tanker, Tewfik, Trade, Traffic, Transit, Transport, Travel, Valley, Vehicles, Vessel, Waterway, Wind, Yacht

Last Friday's Answer: Jewels

To purchase **WONDERWORD** books, visit www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480.

STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call 1-900-226-5955! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

Lawrence rallies Jaguars from 27 down to beat Chargers 31-30



JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP)—Trevor Lawrence's confidence somehow

never wavered. Not after the first interception. Or the second. Or the third. Or even the fourth.

The generational quarterback simply delivered a generational comeback.

The No. 1 overall pick in the 2021 draft followed four interceptions with four touchdown passes — one of the most improbable turnarounds in NFL postseason history — and rallied the Jacksonville Jaguars to a 31-30 victory over the Los Angeles Chargers on Saturday night.

Lawrence engineered the winning drive, highlighted by Travis Etienne's 25-yard run on a fourth-and-1 play, and put the Jaguars in position for Riley Patterson's 36-yard field goal on the final play. It capped a 27-point comeback, the largest in franchise history and the third largest in playoff history.

"You couldn't write a crazier script," Lawrence said. "We said in the locker room that's kind of how our season's going. We're never out of the fight. ... I'm kind of speechless, honestly, just to see what belief can do and to see when a team believes in each other what you can accomplish."

Patterson's kick barely stayed inside the right upright and set off a raucous celebration for a franchise that had won a combined four games over the previous two years. The Jaguars (10-8) won their sixth consecutive game and fifth straight at home — all five in come-from-behind fashion.

Nonetheless, no one could have seen this one coming.



Jacksonville Jaguars quarterback Trevor Lawrence (16) leaps for a two-point conversion against the Los Angeles Chargers during the second half of an NFL wild-card football game, Saturday, Jan. 14, 2023, in Jacksonville, Fla.

Maybe not even Lawrence. But he was the steady hand in charge after a debacle of a first half. He finished 28-of-47 passing for 288 yards, a shocker considering the way he started.

Lawrence was downright dreadful to begin Jacksonville's first playoff game since losing in the 2017 AFC title game. He became the third quarterback in the Super Bowl era to throw four interceptions in the first half of a playoff game, joining Detroit's Gary Danielson and Denver's Craig Morton.

But he bounced back as well as anyone in NFL history. Jacksonville's comeback goes down in postseason lore behind only Buffalo's rally on Jan. 3, 1993 (32 points against Houston) and Indianapolis' on Jan. 4, 2014 (28 points against Kansas City).

"I didn't have a choice," Lawrence said. "If we're going to win that game, digging ourselves a hole like that, you've got to score a lot of points. By doing that, your quarterback's got to play well. So I clearly didn't have much of a choice."

"These guys have sacrificed way too much for me to be the reason we lose an opportunity. That's what I was thinking about. I know I'm going to make the plays. I've just got to get back on track. The guys around me made plays. It's not just me."

The Jaguars, who also turned the ball over when a punt hit Chris Claybrook's helmet, became the first team to win a playoff game with a turnover differential of minus-five or worse. Teams with that turnover deficit had been 0-19 in

the Super Bowl era.

Lawrence misfired early and often and started getting booed long before halftime. His confidence seemed shot. His swagger appeared gone. All the progress he made in his first season with coach Doug Pederson looked like it would be flushed in the team's finale.

But Lawrence never gave up. He connected with Evan Engram, Marvin Jones, Zay Jones and Christian Kirk for touchdowns that increasingly raised the team's belief in its quarterback and its comeback.

Lawrence added one of the biggest plays when he jumped for a 2-point conversion with 5:25 to play that made it 30-28 — and put the Jaguars in position to win instead of tie.

Jacksonville's defense responded by sacking Justin

Herbert and then forcing a punt. Lawrence took over from there, with a significant assist from Etienne — and Peterson's bold play call.

"I feel like the running back, when it gets to that point of the game, you're supposed to be the closer," Etienne said. "Coach believed in me on that fourth-and-1, to give me the ball. I had to make something happen for my teammates."

CHARGERS COLLAPSE

Herbert threw for 273 yards and a touchdown without an interception, but the Chargers' offense was largely ineffective after a 62-yard TD drive that made it 24-0 midway through the second quarter. Los Angeles (10-8) finished with 320 yards of offense and 18

first downs, and it produced only three points on four second-half possessions.

Chargers coach Brandon Staley surely will be questioned for being too conservative — he opted for a field goal on fourth-and-3 midway through the fourth quarter that Cameron Dicker missed — and for not trying to run the ball more. LA had 23 rushing attempts for 69 yards, a 2.9-yard average, while Herbert threw 43 times.

ANOTHER PENALTY

Jaguars rookie linebacker Travon Walker, the first overall pick in the 2022 draft, was flagged for unnecessary roughness after a second-down sack in the fourth quarter. Instead of facing third-and-13, the Chargers got 15 yards and an automatic first down, extending the drive that ended with Dicker's missed field goal from 40 yards.

It looked like it would be the third time this season that Walker had a costly penalty late in a game.

He was flagged for roughing the passer on a third-and-12 play that helped Indianapolis beat Jacksonville in Week 6. A week earlier, he drew a 15-yard penalty for unnecessary roughness against Houston, turning a third-and-20 play into a first down. The Texans found the end zone seven plays later and won.

KEY INJURIES

Chargers receiver DeAndre Carter and left tackle Jamaree Salyer left the game with ankle injuries. Chargers cornerback Michael Davis left with a pectoral muscle injury. Lawrence cut the tip of his left thumb in the fourth but wrapped it up and played on.

SANTA CLARA, Calif. (AP)—Brock Purdy got flushed out of the pocket, spun back the other direction and found a wide-open Elijah Mitchell for the score that put San Francisco in control for good.

Purdy answered another test and delivered another sterling performance in a remarkable rookie season that began as the final pick in the NFL draft.

Purdy threw three touchdown passes and ran for a fourth score in his playoff debut, leading the 49ers to a 41-23 victory over the Seattle Seahawks in a wild-card game on Saturday.

"Once the game started, it was just 11 on 11, I have to do my job, get it to the guys in space and go from there," Purdy said. "We didn't make it more than what it was. ... It wasn't, 'Oh my gosh it's the playoffs and we got to get all tense.' We just have to play our game."

Purdy picked up where

Purdy's 4 TDs lead 49ers past Seahawks 41-23 in playoffs

he left off in the regular season for the 49ers (14-4) and showed few signs of playoff jitters by winning his sixth straight start since replacing an injured Jimmy Garoppolo early in a Week 13 win over Miami.

The Niners advanced to the divisional round where they will host either Minnesota, Tampa Bay or Dallas next weekend.

Purdy connected on a 3-yard pass to Christian McCaffrey in the first quarter, converted a 1-yard sneak in the third quarter and a 7-yard TD pass to Mitchell early in the fourth to make it 31-17.

The Niners broke it open when Deebo Samuel took a short pass from Purdy and raced in for a 74-yard score with help from a downfield block by Brandon Aiyuk.

Purdy threw for 332 yards — the second most ever for a rookie in the playoffs to Rus-

sell Wilson's 385 in a loss to Atlanta 10 years ago — and he became the first rookie QB ever to account for four TDs in a playoff game.

Purdy has lived up to the confidence his coaches and teammates have shown in him ever since he took over.

"I felt that way from the beginning once he got in that game against Miami," coach Kyle Shanahan said. "We didn't have the luxury to sit there and worry about stuff the way the game was going. We just had to win the game and he's done a hell of a job. He's done it every time since. I have a lot of confidence in him."

The Seahawks (9-9) kept it close for most of three quarters before a strip sack by Charles Omenihu late in the third quarter spoiled a red zone drive.

Purdy then hit Jauan Jennings on a 33-yard pass to set up the TD pass to Mitchell that

broke the game open. Purdy tied an NFL record for rookies set by Justin Herbert with his seventh straight game with multiple TD passes.

"He has showed us over and over again who he is and the type of player he is," linebacker Fred Warner said. "So I'm not surprised."

San Francisco piled on from there.

The loss brought a disappointing end to a surprising season for the Seahawks, who got into the playoffs on the final weekend in their first season after trading away Wilson.

Geno Smith stepped in admirably, throwing 30 TD passes in the regular season and keeping it close for a while in the playoff game thanks to a 50-yard TD pass to DK Metcalf in the first half.

Smith finished 25 for 35 for 253 yards, two TDs and one interception.

"I'm not at all satisfied,"

Smith said. "I don't feel good about what happened today. I feel like we we could have kept going. So for me, man, I just got to be better and I take this one personally."

The Niners raced out to a 10-0 lead after two possessions getting a field goal on the opening drive and then a 3-yard pass from Purdy to McCaffrey following McCaffrey's 68-yard run on the second possession.

But Seattle battled back with a 14-play drive capped by Kenneth Walker's 7-yard run and the deep pass to Metcalf.

MOTIVATION

The Niners responded after Seattle safety Johnathan Abram grabbed and twisted Samuel's previously injured left ankle on a tackle early in the second half. Samuel stayed down to get his temper under control as his teammates ral-

lied to his side.

The play angered the Niners, who responded by scoring the next 25 points to take control.

"At the end of the day, that turned our team up a notch and as you can see we went out there and made plays," Samuel said.

BONEHEAD PLAY

The Seahawks took a 17-16 lead into the half thanks to a bonehead play by Niners safety Jimmie Ward. Smith scrambled 9 yards to his own 47 with 1 second left in the half, but Ward hit him late after he started sliding.

The 15-yard penalty moved the ball to the San Francisco 38 and Jason Myers made a 56-yard field goal to make it 17-16 at the half.

Seattle became the third team since the start of the 2000 postseason to lead at the half in a playoff game after trailing by at least 10 at the end of the first quarter.

Morant's slam in Indy highlights Grizzlies' 9th straight win



INDIANAPOLIS (AP)—Ja Morant had 23 points, 10 assists and another ferocious dunk, and the Memphis Grizzlies beat the Indiana Pacers 130-112 on Saturday night to extend the NBA's longest current winning streak to nine games.

Desmond Bane scored 25 points to lead the Grizzlies, who tied Denver for the Western Conference's best record at 29-13.

Neither Bane nor Morant was needed in the fourth quarter. Morant's soaring slam over Jalen Smith made it a 20-point game with 4:20 left in the third, and Memphis led by as much as 34 in the fourth.

Asked if the dunk was his best, Morant said, "Yeah, easy" because of the difficulty, then added, "It's what everybody has been waiting for. I finally made it."

Added Bane: "I ain't seen nothing like that one. That's probably going to go down as dunk of the year."

The game was tied in the second quarter before Memphis outscored the Pacers 27-11 to take a 68-52 lead at halftime. Morant had five points and four assists during that span.

"Obviously we're having fun out there, playing hard and playing together," said Bane, who grew up in Richmond, Indiana.

Santi Aldama added 17 points and Ziaire Williams 13 for the Grizzlies.

"We're not playing perfect basketball," Grizzlies coach Taylor Jenkins said of the streak. "I'm just glad our guys are finding different ways to win, whether we're playing with a lead or playing from behind. Each game has presented a different challenge for us and our guys have stayed the course."



Memphis Grizzlies guard Ja Morant (12) shoots around Indiana Pacers forward Jalen Smith (25) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Indianapolis, Saturday, Jan. 14, 2023.

Celtics 122, Hornets 106

In Charlotte, N.C., Jayson Tatum scored 17 of his 33 points in a pivotal third quarter, Malcolm Brogdon added 30 points and Boston beat Charlotte to push its winning streak to six.

Al Horford had 16 points and Marcus Smart added 13 points and 12 assists for the Celtics, who made 19 3-pointers and erased a 16-point, first-half deficit.

LaMelo Ball finished with 31 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for Charlotte. Terry Rozier had 21 points for the Hornets, who have lost seven of their last eight games.

Tatum, who had 35 points in

a 140-105 rout of the Hornets on Nov. 28, shook off a slow start and an early technical foul and finished 12 of 27 from the field.

76ers 118, Jazz 117

In Salt Lake City, Joel Embiid made a jumper with 5.7 seconds to lift Philadelphia to a victory over Utah.

James Harden had 31 points and 11 assists to lead Philadelphia. Embiid chipped in 30 points and seven rebounds. Tyrese Maxey scored 21 points and Shake Milton added 17.

Jordan Clarkson scored 38 points and grabbed nine rebounds for Utah. Talen Horton-Tucker chipped in a

season-high 20 points off the bench. Mike Conley added 14 points and eight assists, while Walker Kessler finished with 15 points and 12 rebounds.

Heat 111, Bucks 95

In Miami, Gabe Vincent scored 27 points, Bam Adebayo had 20 points and 13 rebounds and Miami beat Milwaukee.

Victor Oladipo added 20 points and Jimmy Butler had 16 for the Heat. Miami won its second straight against the Bucks after a 108-102 home victory on Thursday.

Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo missed the two games against Miami because of left knee soreness. The Heat also were short-handed as guards Tyler Herro (Achilles soreness) Kyle Lowry (knee discomfort) sat out.

Bobby Portis scored 15 points, Pat Connaughton had 14 points and Brook Lopez finished with 13 for the Bucks, who finished 2-2 on their road trip.

Trail Blazers 136, Mavericks 119

In Portland, Ore., Damian Lillard had 36 points and 10 assists, and Portland snapped a five-game losing streak with a win over Dallas.

Jusuf Nurkic added 22 points and 11 rebounds for the Blazers.

Spencer Dinwiddie led Dallas with 25 points. Luka Dončić was held to a season-low 15 points before Mavericks coach Jason Kidd pulled him with seven minutes to go.

Portland led by as many as 20 points early in the second half and went into the fourth quarter up 106-90.

The teams complete their four-game season series Sunday night in Portland.

Hawks 114, Raptors 103

In Toronto, Trae Young scored 29 points, Dejounte Murray had 27 and Atlanta never trailed in a victory over Toronto.

Onyeka Okongwu had 10 points and 13 rebounds, and AJ Griffin came off the bench to score 13 as the Hawks won for the third time in four games after losing five of their previous six. Atlanta won at Indiana on Friday on a last-second basket by John Collins.

Ninth-place Atlanta came in one game ahead of 10th-place Toronto in the Eastern Conference standings. The Hawks won the third and final regular-season meeting between the teams to take the series 2-1.

Scottie Barnes led Toronto with 27 points and 12 rebounds, and Pascal Siakam scored 15 points before fouling out.

Timberwolves 110, Cavaliers 102

In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 26 points and Minnesota got a huge boost from its bench in a victory over Cleveland.

Naz Reid scored 17 of Minnesota's 56 bench points, while Jalen Nowell had 16. Luka Garza added nine for the short-handed Wolves.

Minnesota was without Rudy Gobert for the second half due to right groin soreness, and Jaden McDaniels picked up his fifth foul just 2:37 into the second half.

Evan Mobley and Jarrett Allen both scored 19 points for Cleveland, and Darius Garland added 15. Donovan Mitchell, who was questionable for Saturday's game with an illness, finished with 14 points on 5-of-16 shooting.

NBA updates All-Star vote numbers; LeBron, Durant still lead

NEW YORK (AP)—LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers is well on his way to catching Kareem Abdul-Jabbar on more than the NBA's career scoring list.

James is on pace to be an All-Star for the 19th time, after the NBA said Thursday he remains the overall leading vote-getter for the Feb. 19 game in Salt Lake City.

Abdul-Jabbar is the only 19-time All-Star in NBA history. James and Kobe Bryant are 18-time selections, and James entered Thursday 423 points away from passing Abdul-Jabbar as the NBA's all-time scoring leader.

James had 4,825,229 votes entering Thursday. That puts him in position to be a captain for the sixth consecutive year — and possibly oppos-

ing Kevin Durant for the third straight time.

Durant, the Brooklyn Nets star who is expected to miss about a month after spraining a knee ligament earlier this week, is the top vote-getter in the Eastern Conference, with 4,509,238 entering Thursday.

The top three frontcourt players and top two guards in each conference will be chosen as starters, with the leading overall vote-getters from each conference serving as captains and choosing their teams.

James tops the list of Western Conference frontcourt players. Denver's Nikola Jokic remained in second (3,441,893) and the Lakers' Anthony Davis remained third (2,950,563).



Sideline for the game by ankle soreness, Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James heads to the bench in the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Denver Nuggets, Monday, Jan. 9, 2023, in Denver.

Durant leads East frontcourt players, just ahead of Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo (4,467,306). But Boston's Jayson Tatum moved ahead of Philadelphia's Joel Embiid this week for the third spot; Tatum had 3,281,124 votes, while Embiid had 3,248,733.

Golden State's Stephen Curry leads all guards in the balloting with 3,901,808 votes. Dallas' Luka Dončić remained No. 2 behind Curry among West guards with 3,649,647 votes.

The top two vote-getters among East guards was also unchanged: Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving leads with 3,024,833 votes, and Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell is second with 2,725,558.

Fan voting counts for 50%

of the starters balloting, a media ballot counts for 25% and the ballots turned in by NBA players count for the other 25%.

James has been a captain in all five previous uses of that process, going 5-0 in All-Star Games. His team beat a Durant-picked team in 2021 and 2022, beat teams picked by Antetokounmpo in 2019 and 2020, and beat a team picked by Curry in 2018.

Durant did not play in either of those games in 2021 or 2022 because of injury.

Voting continues through Jan. 21. The captains and the starters will be announced Jan. 26. Reserves — chosen by NBA coaches — will be revealed Feb. 2. The All-Star captains will then draft their teams, probably in the second week of February.

Run for the Red 5K on Feb. 11

By LEIGH GASES

leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Spread the love and support for your loved ones by joining the American Red Cross-NMI Chapter's Run for the Red 5K fundraising event on Saturday, Feb. 11 at the Com-

monwealth Ports Authority Airport Field.

The early bird registration fee is \$20 until Jan. 21; regular price is \$25 until Feb. 5; and late registration is \$30 until Feb. 11. All proceeds will go toward

the American Red Cross-NMI Chapter.

RUN RED5K
+

Medals will be awarded to the Top 3 in the men's and women's divisions, above 18 years old, students from 12th grade and below, and the

stroller divisions.

Free refreshments will be provided along with a free event long sleeve shirt to the first 300 registrants.

This event is in collaboration with Run Saipan. Click on the link to register <https://raceroster.com/events/2023/71090/run-for-the-red-5k>

Run Saipan president, Edward Dela Cruz Jr. said, "The American Red Cross [NMI Chapter] wanted to hold a collaborative event together and we accepted. We are beyond excited and ecstatic to say we are helping the American Red Cross NMI Chapter with their first fundraiser event for 2023. All proceeds will be going to the American Red Cross NMI chapter. We thank the American Red

Cross for partnering with us as well as for all that they do for the people of the CNMI."

"Run Saipan would also like to [give a] shout out to the Commonwealth Ports Authority's executive director Christopher Tenorio and [his] team for being very supportive of the fundraiser by letting us use the airport area as the 5K route for our event! Thank you CPA!" said Dela Cruz.

GCA

From Page 20

eta, Jayme Vargas, Wynona Blas, Hailey Benavente, Karmel Lucas, Rhodaly Zanduetta, Lana Taule, Kashlie Aguon, and Carmen Wenio all played with heart, but fell short as they were unable to return serves and land their shots.

GCA head coach Cesar Libut said after the game that this might have been the girls' best performance after their undefeated run. "We were champions last year and they had to work so hard just to defend their title, so I owe it all to them. Every game, they've improved a lot."

He also acknowledged the effort that the Tatagas showed on the court in the

finals, "Tanapag gave us a good game. I just want to give a cheer for their coaches. They pushed us to [do our] best, so congratulations."

With Gomez, Hall, Ota, Camacho, and Villagomez all heading into high school next school year, Libut wanted them to be ready for high school volleyball, so a good bump and a well-placed setup for a spike was what they focused on in their practices. "We're trying to prepare them for high school, so bumps, sets, spikes—at an early age, if they get used to that, it's a big advantage... as you saw, everything was in order. You know where the ball is going, you know who is going to spike, so it's a setup that we've been practicing everyday, and it [paid] off."

Gomez, who just turned 14 and was handed a birthday present in the form of a medal and championship trophy, said that she felt good and stress-free after winning on her birthday. She also said her team, who practiced three or four times a week, did their best this season. "We tried our best and did our best. Mr. Cesar [Libut] helped us and motivated us to do our best. We practice very hard also, so I think we earned it."

Earlier in the quarterfinals, Saipan International School ousted Dandan Middle School, while Dr. Rita Hocog Inos Jr. High School made it to the Final Four after they defeated Hopwood Middle School. The Tatagas then kicked SIS out in the semis.

IRIN

From Page 20

ships in Fiji.

Chung took part in two tournaments—the Margaret Court Cup, from Jan. 5 to 9; and the Victorian Junior Grass Court Championships, from Jan. 10 to 14.

While Chung finished 0-5 in the singles of the Margaret Court Cup, she and doubles partner Taryn Nadler finished runner-up in the girls 16.

She and Nadler advanced to the finals following a 6-1, 6-0 win over Isabella Parsons and Zemichke Snyman. They, however, lost to Kaylee Davidson and Carla Pearson in a hard-fought third-set tiebreaker in the finals, 4-6, 7-5, 8-10.

"For Margaret's Court Cup, I did not play very well for singles but Taryn Nadler and

I got runners-up in U16 girls doubles," she said.

In the Victorian Junior Grass Court Championships, Chung finished third overall in the girls 16 singles with a 3-2 win-loss record.

She beat Snyman, 6-3, 6-2; Paige Vickery, 6-2, 6-1, and Parson, 4-1, 4-0. In doubles, Chung and her partner Parsons won one match out of four.

Chung said it took her a while to get used to playing in Australia, especially because of the unusual conditions she wasn't accustomed to.

"It was really difficult to play here the first few days because it was grass court and it was my first time. I think playing in Australia was a great experience since I got to play against stronger players from many other countries. The weather has also been extremely hot and I had to play four matches in one day

which was a challenge," she told *Saipan Tribune*.

While in Australia, Chung said Raynal Singh and Michelle Jaggard-Lai served as her coaches.

Getting a berth to the Margaret Court Cup and Victorian Junior Grass Court Championships after a third-place stint in the POJC was remarkable for Chung considering she was a wildcard entry for the North Pacific team.

Chung dedicated her stint in Australia and finishing second in doubles in the Margaret Court Cup and third in singles in the Victorian Junior Grass Court Championships to her family, friends, players she's been practicing with and national coach and CNMI sports hall of famer Jeff Race.

Race is also president of the Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Irin Chung poses with her fellow players and coaches from this weekend's Victorian Junior Grass Court Championships in Australia.



LEIGH GASES

Ella Hall goes up for a spike that teammate Llyana Libut, right, set up for her during the second set of the championship game of the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Middle School Volleyball League 2022-2023 versus Tanapag Middle School on Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

SILDREY

From Page 20

them out.

The Run Saipan Trinity '23 is a three-day running event to kickstart the club's yearlong calendar of races.

Run Saipan president Edward Dela Cruz Jr., who also ran the race, said "This is a historic first for a three-day back to

back foot race in the Marianas."

On a Run Saipan Facebook post, it said "Run Saipan would like to extend its most sincere appreciation, gratitude, and thanks to the management of Kensington Hotel Saipan and E-Land Group for allowing us to hold Day 1 of our race at their hotel."

Holding the race at Kensington Hotel provided our participants with not only

parking but a safe and secure area for their finish line. We cannot thank the management of Kensington enough for providing us with maximum security for our Inaugural Run Saipan Trinity."

Results of yesterday's Day 2, 5K at Mt. Tapochao and today's Day 3, 5K along the Oleai Beach Road Pathway will be posted in the next issues of *Saipan Tribune*.



Lawrence rallies
Jaguars from 27
down to beat
Chargers 31-30
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Saipan Tribune Sports

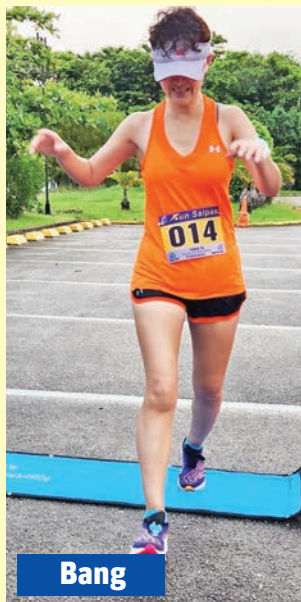
Run for the
Red 5K on
Feb. 11

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SAIPAN TRIBUNE



Bang

Sildrey, Ann top 10K of Run Saipan's Trinity series

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER



In the first race of three consecutive races in the Inaugural Run Saipan Trinity '23, Sildrey Veloria and Ann Bang were the fastest in their 10K run back to Kensington Hotel on Saturday.

Veloria, who was first to the finish line overall, clocked in at 45:39 in the wet, early morning trek from the Kensington Hotel parking lot to a little past the Last Command

Post in Marpi and back.

Chad Taflinger came in second with a time of 49:02, with Chong Nam Lee right at his heels with 49:43.

In an interview with *Saipan Tribune*, Veloria said that "the course was kind of tricky because there are some parts of it that have hills. Usually, I will struggle to go up hills, but now it was pretty easy for me to get into a groove and hold a pace that I was comfortable with."

He added that with the rainy weather, "I feel like I will perform better without the rain, but there's nothing I can do

about the weather. Overall, the race was pretty fun, and I hope to do more 10K races in the future."

In a changing of the tide, the fastest woman on the course this time around was Ann Bang, who finished at 54:36 and beat Rosemarie Chisato, who came in second with a time of 55:14. With a time of 57:46, Terra Allen completed the Top 3.

Bang exclaimed "finally!" after she was told she came in first for the women's division, as Chisato usually comes in first. But Bang said she knew

that the other women kept their energy for the next two days of races. "That's why I can win today, but tomorrow, nobody knows, but I did my best today."

She said in the first 5K, she ran with Chisato, but that she pulled ahead in the last stretch and kept the lead. Bang added that the course was good, "better than hot and humid [weather]. Windy and a little rainy is good for a run." The 49-year-old said that it was a bit slippery but the group runs they have every week helps

See SILDREY on Page 19



Veloria

GCA wins second straight MS v-ball title



LEIGH GASES

The Grace Christian Academy Lady Eagles players and coach Cesar Libut, right, won the championship for the second straight year in a row after defeating Tanapag Middle School in the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Middle School Volleyball League 2022-2023 last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

It was indeed a happy birthday for team captain Sofia Gomez, as her team, the Grace Christian Academy Lady Eagles, won the championships for the second straight year in a row in the NMIVA-PSS Interscholastic Middle School Volleyball League 2022-2023 last Saturday at the Marianas High School Gymnasium.

After a perfect regular season of eight wins, the Lady Eagles continued to be a force to be reckoned with in the playoffs as they came out unscathed and still undefeated

after beating Tanapag Middle School Tatagas in the finale.

In two sets, the Lady Eagles, with a roster of Gomez, Llyana Libut, Ella Hall, Dianna Zheng, Ana Villagomez, Mi-



sako Ota, Nevaeh Camacho, Sarah Lim, and Miley Mafnas, blew the Tatagas out of the water, 21-9, 21-15.

A series of aces from Libut and Zheng, coupled with well-placed spikes from Hall guaranteed the championship trophy would stay in their possession.

Meanwhile, the Tatagas, who had a 7-1 record in the regular season after falling to GCA, lost to them in the quarterfinals earlier in the day and could still not get past the might of the Lady Eagles in the finals.

The Tatagas' Erica Zandu- See GCA on Page 19

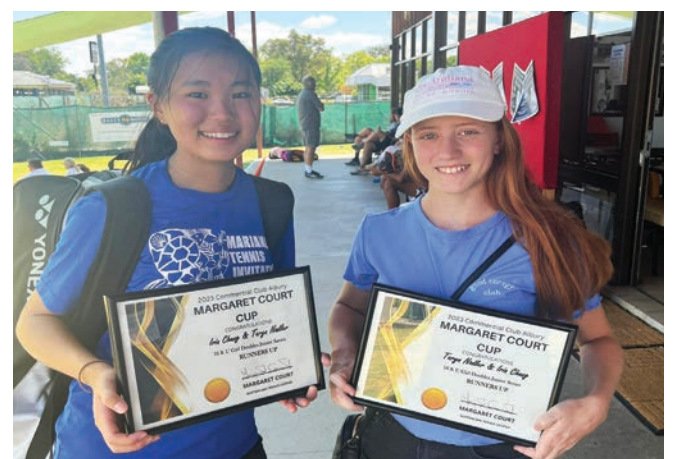
Irin Chung plays in Australia

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR



While her fellow junior players are dealing with rain delay in the ongoing 2023 SIS Student Council Tennis Tournament, Irin Chung has been sharpening her tennis skills in Australia the past couple of weeks.

The 14-year-old Saipan International School student got the opportunity to play in the Land Down Under after getting third place in her age group in last year's Pacific Oceania Junior Champion- See IRIN on Page 19



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Irin Chung, left, and Taryn Nadler pose with their girls 16 doubles runner-up certificates in last weekend's Victorian Junior Grass Court Championships in Australia.